Leave Me Alone! Can't You See I'm Learning This Language?

Greg Thomson

Saturday, April 24, 1993

Learning a language means becoming part of a speech community 1
- No relationships—no language! 1
- Doing unto others, with others also doing unto you 2

Your entry point into the speech community 3
- Finding a mediating person 3
- The mediating person as a Language Resource Person 5
- Language learning at the entry point: no free lunches 6
- Language learning at the entry point: time to think about doing something 8

Branching out: getting a network 12
- Introduction to social networks 13
- Your new social network at the outset 16
- Enlarging and strengthening your network 17

Coping with some less than ideal situations 19
- Learning in a truly monolingual society 19
- Learning in a totally bilingual society 19
- Language Learning when there is limited access to the society 20

My network is growing and strengthening—now what? 21
- Bootstrapping your way to good behaviour 21
- Systematic language learning in your new speech community 22
    - What should I learn next? 23
    - Carrying the language sessions into real-life encounters 23
    - Learning to communicate in general 24
    - Systematically expanding you cultural knowledge 25
    - Focusing on social skills 25
    - Focusing on language functions 25
    - Avoiding fossilization 26
- But it sounds so hard 27
    - Your time commitment 27
    - When to start 27
    - Staying encouraged 28
    - Don't get stuck on your way to first base 28

Conclusion 28

Leave Me Alone! Can't You See I'm Learning This Language?*

Greg Thomson

Saturday, April 24, 1993

Imagine yourself crashed on a desert island, all alone, with nothing but a radio, and fortunately, a solar powered battery charger, and a good supply of rechargeable batteries. The only station you can get on the radio is in Mandarin Chinese. Having discovered and read the journals of several others who were stranded there before you, you realize you may be there for the rest of your life. You've always wanted to learn a foreign language. This is your big chance. Any other pastime available to you seems boring by comparison. So find yourself a cozy sand dune, hunker down, and turn your radio on.

Learning a language means becoming part of a speech community.

I can think of two good reasons you are not going to learn any Chinese. Probably the most obvious reason is that although you hear plenty of Chinese being spoken, you have no way to find out what anything means. The second reason is closely related to the first. It is, I believe, more basic. You cannot learn Chinese because you have no relationship of any sort with anyone who uses Chinese.

No relationships—no language!

Language implies relationships. The great philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein reasoned that there can be no such thing as a private language, meaning a language which belongs to a single individual (Wittgenstein, 1953). His reasons are rather philosophical, and his claim has been, like everything in philosophy, rather controversial. But I have my own (nonphilosophical) reasons for agreeing with Wittgenstein. A language is a means of communication between people. Suppose I see someone stealing your car, but you are looking the other way. What I see is now a part of my experience but not of yours. Language enables me to describe my experience to you with a statement like, "Hey, that guy is stealing your car". There may be other uses of language, but they are all derivative on this basic one: language lets me make my experience available to you. What would it mean then for me to have a private language, that is, a way of making my experience available to myself? As soon as I have experienced an experience, indeed, while I am in the process of experiencing it, it is available to me. I can't make myself aware of what I'm already aware of by telling myself about it.

So when you talk about language, you're talking about community. You learned your first language within a community, and you learned it as a means of participating in community. The famous linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure compared language to a contract between the people who use it (Saussure, 1959). If I secretly decide to mean *cat* whenever I say the word *dog*, I will be misunderstood by all members of the English speaking community whenever I use the word *dog*. The word *dog* stand for dogs, but it doesn't stand for dogs in the abstract. It stands for dogs in that it is used by people to talk to other people about dogs. Take away other people, and you take away language.

* Thanks are due to Marv Mayers and Larry Yost for their comments on an earlier draft.

Language is an interpersonal thing, a shared thing, a communal thing. No community, no language.

Now, you want to learn a language. I hope you can see that what you are saying is that you want to become part of a community, and function in that community by means of its language, which is its primary means of *being* a community.

(If you're the argumentative type, you're probably thinking of scenarios where everyone but you has been killed by a meteor, or perhaps you're thinking about people who learn a "dead" language from written documents. If I were argumentative, I'd convince you that even in these cases language only exists through participation in communities. Good thing I'm not argumentative. Instead, I'll move right ahead with the discussion of what this all means for us as language learners.)

Think of how you learned your first language. A very small number of people interacted with you. This probably included your mother, and may have included other caretakers and older siblings. They were part of a larger language community, but at that point you did not have a lot to do with that larger community. There may have been a period of several months where your mother and siblings were the only ones who could easily understand what you were saying. As you ventured out farther into the world, your speech had to become more and more like that of the larger speech community.

Let's agree then, that learning Mandarin means (among other things) becoming part of a community which uses Mandarin as its main means of interaction. That community contains hundreds of millions of people. Do you enter into a relationship with hundreds of millions of people? The answer is yes. Recall that a language is like a contract between the people who use it. Everyone in that community accepts certain rules, and plays by those rules. Though most of the members of the community will never meet one another, nevertheless, should they meet, they would at once recognize that they are members of the same community insofar as they recognize that their behavior is constrained by the same rules (or at least reasonably similar rules).

Doing unto others, with others also doing unto you

For communities to exist, people must share certain rules, or norms, of behavior. People don't usually think about most of the norms that they share with others in their communities. They may think about some of the norms, as when a parent tells a child "You're supposed to say 'thank you' when someone does something nice for you." However, that same parent may not realize that moments earlier, someone did something nice for her, and she didn't say "Thank you," but instead said, "You're too kind," or perhaps, "How thoughtful of you," or maybe, "You'll never know how much I appreciate that," or possibly, "Hey, great!". In those cases, the parent is following much more detailed, fine-tuned norms for expressing gratitude than the four-year-old who says "Thank you" is aware of at this point. The overwhelming majority of the norms which unite a community are ones that are rarely or never thought about consciously or discussed.

The main purpose of the community-wide norms is to ensure that the behavior of one person does not adversely affect other people. Therefore, someone who is seen to be a non-follower of the community norms is seen to be a potential threat to the community. Of course, in some cases it is clear that someone is still learning the norms. That implies the person is new to the community. That new person may be a baby. Or it may be you.

The norms which define a community become particularly important in the context of *transactions*. A transaction occurs when two people interact. If I sell you a used car, that is a transaction. If I meet you in the hall and smile, that too is a transaction.

For you to learn your new language is going to require that people talk to you, and listen to you, for thousands of hours. That will involve a very large number of transactions! A popular approach to understanding transactions is called the *exchange*

theory (Homans, 1958, discussed in Milroy, 1987). According to the exchange theory, in every transaction there is a cost and a benefit. If I sell you a used car, you will receive something of value (the car) and so will I receive something of value (the money). (Likewise, we'll both be giving up something of value.) If I give you a ridiculously good deal, say, charging you only half of the true value of the car, and we are both aware that I have given you a ridiculously good deal, then sometime in the future when I ask a "small favour" of you, you may feel obliged to grant me the favour. That is because when the exchange is uneven, it creates a sense of indebtedness, called an *obligation* in the exchange theory. If I give you a smile, you can give me a smile in exchange. We both made each other feel warm and fuzzy. No obligation was created because we each gave something of equal value to the other.

The implications of this concept for language learners are enormous. Right now you have zero Mandarin Chinese (or Chukchee, or whatever) in your head. That is, there is an incomprehensibly large goody, i.e. the Chinese language, which you need. It is entirely in the possession of other people. The only way you will get it is if they give it to you. If you are going to be in the process of becoming a functioning part of a community of Chinese speakers, then something equal in value to what you are going to receive (the language, among other things) in the course of countless transactions will need to pass in the opposite direction, that is, from you to them. That should give you something to think about.

And to make matters worse, you'll start out as a potential trouble maker. Spradley and McCurdy (1984) gave the title *Conformity and Conflict* to their collection of readings in cultural anthropology. They explain that the very set of shared norms which makes it possible for a community to function smoothly (*conformity*) can become a destructive force when two communities come into contact (*conflict*). That is because those shared norms define what is good and bad in the eyes of the people who share them. Here you come, into the midst of conformers, a ready made source of conflict, since you operate by different standards of good and bad. You need a massive transaction to occur if you are to learn the language, but the deck is clearly stacked against your being able to hold up your end of the exchange. It will be very kind of them if you end up learning their language!

Your entry point into the speech community

Relax. You will be glad to learn that you don't have to cope with all of that all at once. You might learn to swim by jumping into the rapids where the water is over your head and icy cold. But that is not the only way to learn to swim. Nor is it necessarily the best way.

What if there is a warm, calm, shallow pool, with a soft, sandy bottom, where you can get your feet wet, and then your knees, etc. And you can try to swim, and make mistakes, and then get the hang of it. Later you can venture into deeper and deeper waters. In the end, you find out that the river wasn't really all that swift, or deep, or cold—just swift, deep and cold enough for a non-swimmer to drown in!

You are going to become part of the new speech community. For you, starting at the shallow end means structuring your own gentle little speech community in which you can learn to dog-paddle. From there you can venture out little by little into a bigger world.

Finding a mediating person

You can begin with just one or two people. People like linguists and anthropologists approach a community through a relatively small number of people. Such

people have traditionally been called *informants*. Most linguists and anthropologists quickly discovered that inside every informant there lurked a friend, waiting to emerge.

There is a reason for this. People aren't forced to be informants. Rather, they want to be. I once wished to learn about the subculture of motor-rickshaw drivers in Hyderabad, Pakistan. I always get stressed out over recruiting an informant. But I recalled a driver who struck me as unusually educated for his profession (I later learned he held a degree in English), and the next time I saw him I told him that I wished to learn of the world of rickshaw-driving from him. He seemed hesitant but agreed to come to my house at a specified time. That time came, and the gate-bell sounded. I went out and down to the gate, to find a man I did not recognize, standing beside a rickshaw. He told me that his friend was nervous about coming and talking to me, and so he was volunteering.

This man turned out to be a very special person indeed. I recorded about two hours of interviews with him, and went over the recordings and asked some questions. He had loads to share on any point I would ask about. After the interviews, he continued to visit, and provided us with new entrance ways into Pakistani life.

The key point I want to make here is that this informant was self-selected. If you seek help from within a group, and out of several people, one or more appear to really want to help you, then you are witnessing this self-selection process at work. Self-selection tends to result in wonderful helpers.

The man I have just described could not speak English, and was not widely traveled. But within his peer-group, he was an outward-reaching, open minded individual. Everyone is different. Some people are tightly bound into a spot near the center of their peer-group and do not like to venture near the edges. There is nothing wrong with that. They may be major contributors to the community's welfare. But their place is right near the middle of their group. Some day, you may be deeply inside that group, and then such people may become wonderful friends. But your very first friends will be people who are more comfortable moving at the periphery of the group, where that group interfaces with outsiders. You'll start out as an outsider. People like my rickshaw driver friend are human bridges. Some time after our interviews he asked me to accompany him and a couple buddies to visit his wife in the hospital. As we rode in the back of a covered Suzuki pick-up (public transportation), two young mothers sat across from us wearing burqas (large black over-garments worn for modesty by Muslim women). As is frequently the case, their veils were flipped back, exposing their faces, but not their hair. Their interest was piqued by this obvious foreigner who appeared to be a local insider. This so validated me in their sight that they asked if I would come to their home in the countryside and visit them. They had their elderly father dictate his address to me, which I wrote down with his pencil. He then insisted I keep the pencil. I stood there with my mouth hanging open as I watched these women flip their veils down over their faces and head for a bus to continue their journey. I previously had the impression that rural women in burqas didn't relate comfortably to men other than close relatives. My rickshaw driver friend didn't know where I got that idea. The fact is, he had validated me and led me in a bit more deeply into the larger Pakistani society.

So, as you seek to wade into the shallow water, you're looking for a person who is comfortable at the edge of his or her community and culture. My rickshaw driver friend was the perfect person at the point when he came along. However, he would not have been the perfect person two years earlier. And since we are concerned with your very first contacts, we need to consider people who are even further from the center of their group.

The kind of person I have in mind has been called a *mediating person* (Bochner, 1981). Taft (1981) describes a variety of people who are near the edge, psychologically speaking, of their society or subculture. Not all of them qualify as mediating persons. Some people may wish they could move away from their culture and adopt yours, and some may already have done just that, at least as far as they are concerned. Taft refers to theirs as *peripheral* membership in the community you are hoping to join. Worse yet, from the standpoint of your needs, are those who Taft calls *isolated*. These extremely

marginalized people have a negative attitude toward their own culture, and toward other cultures as well. Once some strangers standing beside me at a newsstand in Pakistan commented "There is one of those capitalist pigs we were talking about". I suspect these were marginalized individuals, and they would not have been the ideal choice for my initial entry point to the larger Pakistani community. A better choice would be people who belong to what Taft calls a *marginal group*. These would be people who have moved out into a different culture (yours in this case), with which they now identify, while retaining a group identity based on their common background. The Chinese community in Calgary would be an example.

True mediating persons, in Taft's typology, are people who remain active in their own culture, and are also completely at home in the other culture, and have positive attitudes toward both cultures. I met people like that in Pakistan, people who lived part of the year in Canada, and part of the year in Pakistan, and were happy in both places.

The mediating person as a Language Resource Person

Ideals are rarely achieved, but it is good to think about them as we seek ~~the~~ to find the best options available. We come back now to the fact that you need to become part, not just of a new community, but of a new *speech community*. That is central to what is meant by *learn a language*. Let's picture the ideal person to serve as your point of entry to the new speech community. Call her Noju. Noju's language and culture of origin are the language and culture you wish to learn, and she also speaks your language with ease. She has participated extensively in your culture, and feels at home in it. She has very positive feelings about both societies, and, for that matter, she would enjoy exploring additional new cultures herself if the opportunity arose. She is a true mediating person. But since we have a special focus on language, we also want her to be a person who is enthusiastic about her mother tongue. She's not a trained linguist (I mean, even ideals aren't *that* ideal), and so she may not have given much thought to the structure of her language, but when you point out a structural observation you have made, such as, "Did you ever notice that no words ever end with *b*, *d*, or *g*," she replies "Wow, that's really interesting". She is not familiar with the latest concepts of second language learning (not *that* ideal), but neither does she have strong opinions as to how it should be done. She is adventurous, and willing to try whatever language learning methods you wish to use, even if they seem a little silly to her at first. Not only is she an ideal mediating person, but she is an ideal Language Resource Person (LRP).

Now ideals are ideals. You may not be able to get very close to this ideal in every respect, though you may get close to it in many respects. The helpful thing about having an ideal in mind is that it will encourage you to avoid making matters worse for yourself than you need to. For example, someone might think there is a special advantage to begin learning the language from the most conservative, monolingual member of the community. Not recommended. That person may later become your best friend, but you need to prepare for that. Otherwise, you could end up making a worst enemy instead of a best friend.

If at all possible, your first LRP should be someone who shares a language with you. For example, if your mother tongue is English, and your LRP is fluent in English, you will be able to use powerful language learning techniques, because you can clearly explain those techniques to your LRP in a language you both know well. In addition, you can concentrate on rapidly learning to comprehend the language, using appropriate techniques, without feeling a lot of pressure to speak the language before you have some familiarity with it. This can greatly reduce the stress of early language learning.

It is also important that you begin working with monolingual LRPs fairly soon, say after one to four months of initial language learning. If no monolingual LRPs are available to you, then you will need to begin working monolingually (in the new

language, not in English!) with your bilingual LRPs. At the point where you can function somewhat in the language you may find it less stressful to work with monolingual LRPs rather than forcing yourself to work monolingually with bilingual LRPs, since that may tend to feel artificial.[1]

Our focus right now, however is on your very first LRPs, and you will prefer that they be bilingual. You will prefer that they not be overly marginalized with regard to their own culture. Hopefully they will be cross-culturally open-minded, outward-reaching people, but nevertheless people with strong and healthy links to many other people within their own community.

How do you find such people? Recall the self-selection process. It may be that the right people will emerge quickly. If not, you will need to employ the network building techniques discussed below, until you arrive at the right people. For now, let's assume that you have found them.

Language learning at the entry point: no free lunches

So here you are. You have located someone who is willing to be your point of entry into the new speech community. I have suggested that initial recruitment may be a simple matter of making your need known and seeing who is interested in helping. There is more to consider. An easy mistake is to make a long-term arrangement with someone who subsequently doesn't work out very well. In working with LRPs in a number of languages, I have noticed that some people catch on really quickly to what I need to do, while others are never going to catch on. If I've made a long term arrangement with someone who doesn't work out, then what do I do? Better to ask someone to help me "for one hour this afternoon" than "for the next three months". Then I can ask, again, and again. Soon I will be able to decide whether a long term arrangement with a particular person will be a good idea. If possible, I should begin with more than one person, so that whoever I work with expects me to work with others, and doesn't feel personally rejected if I end up not working with him or her all that much. Bear in mind also that someone who is not ideal for my initial language learning may come to be very helpful at a later stage.

Next comes that troublesome exchange *theory* we discussed before. Every transaction (including every interaction between you and your LRP) involves something of equal value going in both directions, or else the party who contributes less to the transaction incurs indebtedness to the other. One of my very first LRPs listened to my request that he help me regularly. I clearly remember his response: "What's in it for me?" A fair question. You might ask what's in it for you, but it is better to ask whether, from your LRP's standpoint, the amount of effort is worth the amount of reward.

In my case, I had a simple solution: minimum wage. But I rushed into that a bit precipitously. I wasn't really giving the guy a job. And he was later to become a real friend. If I could go back and start over I might well do things differently. First of all, I wouldn't propose it as a job offer. Rather than, "Will you be my main language teacher?", I would have asked, "Can you help me for a few minutes?" Once he was comfortable with what we were doing, I would say, "Any chance we could do this for a couple hours next Saturday morning?" I would have incurred indebtedness. In that situation, I now realize that opportunities would have quickly arisen for me to reciprocate. Whenever he bought his groceries, he might easily end up paying five dollars to someone to take him

---

[1] Mary Mayers (p.c.) points out a special problem with multilingual helpers. Strange as it may seem, such people may not be completely clear where one language ends and another begins. They unconsciously switch between them and mix them, based on complicated factors in the situation in which they are speaking. In speaking to you in the artificial setting of your language session, they may use a language mixture rather than the language you innocently think you are learning.

home (this was awhile ago), unless, that is, he met someone who had an obligation to take him home. My paying him minimum wage for helping me learn the language sure made it easier for me to refuse him rides. But that risked creating hard feelings anyway.

And just the other day, a member of that same culture reminded me, "You know how it is when a friend asks you to lend him money. If he's really your friend, you're not going to be thinking 'that guy owes me money'. If he thinks of it some time, he might pay you back, but you're not going to mention it to him."

How I wish I could go back and start over, knowing what I know now. I had the opportunity to participate in a rich system of rights and obligations, and I opted to pay minimum wage as the easy way out. Mind you, I've known people who didn't want to pay their LRPs minimum wage, but neither did they want to give rides or make "loans". I suspect if I had done things the way I should have, it would have cost me more than paying minimum wage, but it also would have "bought" me far more than I got by paying minimum wage. There is no stingy way to become part of a new speech community. It costs what it costs. And it's worth what it costs.

This is not to say that there will not be times when paying a fixed hourly amount will be desirable or necessary. I find it easiest to have a scheduled daily time with an LRP. In many cases, this may best be remunerated by direct cash payments. It may still be possible to start out as though your LRP is doing you a favour, but then at the end of the first week to say, "Here, take this. You've been such a great help. I'd feel guilty not to give you something. It's not much." But be sure that "not much" is at least minimum wage (according to local standards)!

On one occasion, when I wanted to improve my fluency through eight hours per day of semi-structured conversation practice for a whole month, there was no choice but to make it a work-for-wages arrangement. Every case is different. In the end, doing something that works, but is less than ideal is to be preferred over giving up on learning the language because the ideal is unachievable.

It should go without saying that you do also need to take into account the actual value of the exchange to you personally, and be fair from your standpoint. I've been envisioning a situation where the payoff to you is that you get to be part of a new community. For some people there will be other rewards, such as an M.A. degree or a Ph.D. partly as a result of the help you are getting. Or perhaps your work will lead to published journal articles, with the accompanying increase in the your professional standing. In such cases you need to be sure that the people who help you receive what will be of comparable value from their perspective. This could indeed be wages, well above minimum wage, as well as other career benefits, along with benefits to the community as a whole which result from your work.

Even if you're main payoff lies simply in becoming part of the new community, you must bear in mind that there is going to be a considerable cost to others. Recall what it is like for you to communicate with someone who is just beginning to learn your native language. It is hard work. So if you are going to become fluent in someone else's language, lots of people are going to work very hard at communicating with you. They must receive something equal in value to the effort they expend. The principle is, something that is perceived by both parties to be of equal value must travel in both directions, sooner or later. You are not allowed to incur a permanent imbalance of payments in your own favour!

Fortunately, material value is not the only value. Milroy (1987) includes such things as "greetings, civilities, jokes, information,...child-minding services, or assistance in times of sickness or poverty" as typical exchange commodities, and refers to exchanges in which the LRP's speech is traded for "sympathy and a boost to the informant's self-esteem". Your friendship and time can be an important reward to others, as theirs is to you. It was obvious that my rickshaw driver friend found a variety of rewards in his relationship with me.

Language learning at the entry point: time to think about doing something

It may sound as though I am assuming that you are a self-directed, independent language learner, learning the language from friends and neighbors, but not taking a formal course. I need to say a word about where formal courses fit in. If a formal language course is an ideal one, it will be your entry point into the new language community. The methods used in the course will involve you in actually using the language creatively from the outset. Some learning activities will focus on comprehension. A native speaker will communicate with you in the new language in ways that require you (and enable you) to process the language (that is, to figure out what is being said), and respond in some way. For example, the native speaker could instruct you to arrange a group of objects in a particular way and you respond by arranging the objects as instructed. As you learn to comprehend more and more, your ability to speak also increases, and you interact in the language with other learners and native speakers, doing role-plays which deal with typical communication situations that you are facing or will face in real life outside of the formal course. The course will also help you to become aware of cross-cultural friction points, and again you may use role-play as a means of gaining the social skills which you need in order to begin functioning acceptably in the new society. From the standpoint of the language, there are two broad challenges in the real world: you must be able to understand the barrage of speech that will come your way, and you must be able to make up new sentences on the spot. An ideal language course will concentrate on developing these two skills.

But some language courses are far from ideal. I can hear at least ninety percent of those readers who are taking formal language courses exclaiming, "But my language course is *nothing* like that." Just the other day I heard two students preparing for the mid-term examination of their introductory German course. Said he to her, "Do you know the second person plural form of möchten?". Welcome to the dark ages. Modern language departments still teach "languages" as though a language were a body of facts, hundreds if not thousands of facts such as "The third person plural subjunctive of X is Y" and "The verb meaning 'to eat' is Z". It is odd that the same modern language departments often offer courses on second language learning theory and practice, in which they describe the what-is-the-second-person-plural-form-of-möchten approach to language teaching as something belonging to the 1940's. Well, welcome to the 1990's. In Pakistan I met people who had been "learning the language" for over a year but who were still not becoming part of a speech community to any extent. A language course does not have to be like that. A language course can give you your very first, sheltered entrance into the speech community, and guide you as you begin to venture farther afield. But if this is not the case with your course, then you will need to work at becoming part of a speech community on your own.

You may not have enrolled in a formal course, but you may have a formal textbook, perhaps with tapes, which you plan to follow. Once again, there is no guarantee that a textbook and tapes will provide an entry into a speech community. You may indeed learn a lot from a formal course, or from a textbook with tapes which will speed your early acquisition of the language and assist your entry into the speech community. But it is important that you realize that you will only learn to communicate by communicating, and the work of entering the speech community still lies before you.

So whether you are taking (or using) a formal course, or have already done formal language study, or are starting from scratch all on your own, your reason for meeting with your LRP is the same: you want to develop communication skills. If you have already done formal study, you have a head start in some ways. You may be able to get right on with conversational practice using pictures or objects of various kinds as focuses of discussion, or struggling to discuss specific topics of interest to you, noting where you get stuck, and making a point to learn what you lack that causes you to get stuck.

If you are starting from scratch on your own, without formal course materials, you can begin with very rudimentary communication skills, exploring the grammar as you go. If formal linguistic descriptions of the language are available to you, they may not make a lot of sense to you at first. If not, don't waste too much time trying to learn and remember everything in them. You can return to them again and again as your comprehension ability and speaking ability continue to grow. Each time you will understand more. You may also find that they are incorrect in some points, unless the linguist who wrote them was a native speaker, or someone who learned the language very well.

So let's say you are learning the language from scratch, on your own, without the aid of any linguistic descriptions. This is not the place for a detailed description of all activities you might engage in to start developing communication ability But here are some suggestions. (See Thomson, 1993a, where I deal with this in detail, as well as Larson, 1984, especially Part III, Stage I).

You want your LRP to understand that you are mainly going to be learning to *communicate*, and you will learn to communicate *by using the language*, and you will provide the needed structure for your language sessions; s/he shouldn't "come prepared". How are you going to communicate when you don't know any of the language? No problem. Your LRP knows plenty of the language. S/he will be the first one to communicate in the new language, albeit under your guidance. One of the best techniques for getting started is the so-called Total Physical Response (TPR) method (Asher, 1982). You begin by having your LRP tell you to do things. S/he can demonstrate what she means by doing the things herself. Better yet, s/he can issue the commands to another speaker of the target language first, and you can learn to comprehend the commands by observing the responses. Then s/he will instruct you to do the same things, and you will respond by carrying out the instructions.

You begin with very simple instructions like "stand", "walk", and "sit". Unfortunately, that is about as far as some people ever go in using TPR. The key is to keep building. You can learn all sorts of complex formations through TPR. Eventually the LRP will be able to tell you something like "If you are holding three dollars, place them in front of him, but if you are only holding two dollars, put them into your pocket" (you can use play money). That may not seem like very meaningful communication, but you may be surprised to find that it is fun, and interesting for both you and your LRP, and that you really do develop the ability to process speech through such activities.

At this stage you want to learn to understand the words for hundreds of common *actions* and *objects*. What objects? You can begin by looking around you. Any object which you are likely to want to be able to talk about within the next few months is fair game (a sample instruction from LRP to you for learning to understand the word for "stove" is "Walk to the *stove*"; you respond by walking to the stove.). To get other ideas for objects, visit the market, buy one of everything, and bring it home (sample instruction from your LRP to you: "Pick up the *cucumber*"). Using TPR you can learn to recognize not only the names of the objects, but other properties of objects, such as size, shape, colour, and quantities, including numbers, and relative locations (sample instruction: "Place *two green* bananas *in front* of me, and put a *yellow* banana *between* them"). Using a family tree diagram (with photos or drawings of people standing for maternal grandmother, father's brother, etc., etc.) you can learn to recognize kinship terms (sample instruction from LRP to you: "Show me the little boy's *sister*"). And don't forget body parts. You can hardly call your self a "speaker" of even "broken Chukchee" if you don't recognize the word for "nose" (sample instruction: "Point to your nose").

Then there are words for *actions*? Some action words were used in the examples above ("*Walk* to the stove", "*Pick up* the cucumber", and so forth). Everything (just about) that you can do with your body is worth learning. And you can also learn expressions for anything that you can do with all those hundreds of objects that you have learned the names of in the previous paragraph! What can you do with a piece of cloth, a

rope, a glass of water, a carrot? (Sample instruction: "Wad up the piece of cloth, and break the carrot into three pieces"). And try to think of everything a person in that community might do in a typical day, from rising until retiring. Any of these actions can form the basis of TPR activities, even if you have to pretend, e.g. that you are shaving.

One of the most powerful aids to communication at this stage is pictures, either photos or drawings (or even videos). Many scenes from everyday life can be used. (Sample instruction: "Show me the picture of someone who is dressed-up.") In addition to TPR activities, your LRP can simply describe the pictures at a level that you are capable of understanding. At the outset, this may simply be "This is a man, This is a woman, This is another man. This is another woman. This is a woman and this is a man. This is a boy. This is a girl. This is a girl and a man." You can build slowly from day to day. As your recognition of basic vocabulary grows, the time will soon come when your LRP can give you detailed descriptions of various aspects of pictures, and you can respond by pointing to the picture you believe s/he is describing. Or she can tell you how the people in the picture would describe what they are doing, or what they might be thinking, and you try to guess which picture she has in mind.

You are probably thinking, what about grammar? Good thought. In your TPR activities, and in your use of pictures, you will plan to emphasize specific sentence patterns, and get a lot of repetition of those specific patterns. For pictures, I have described how you might do this in another paper (Thomson, 1989, 1993a).

One thing you will want to learn to comprehend right away is the pronoun system. This may consist of separate pronoun words, like *I*, *you*, *he*, in English. Or there may be special endings on the verbs (suffixes) or special beginnings on the verbs (prefixes) which carry these meanings. For example, if you say *hablo*, in Spanish, the meaning is "I speak", but the part that carries the meaning of the English word *I*, is the *o*. Often there will be both separate words, and prefixes or suffixes on the verb. Thus to say "I speak" in Spanish one can also say, *Yo hablo*, where the word *yo* is also translated *I*. You'll want to learn to understand such pronouns functioning as subject ("If *I* am eating peas, pick up a carrot."), as object ("Pat *me*") and in other roles ("Put the pencil *near me*"; "Write your name *for me*"; "Pick up the rope *with me*"). Be prepared for surprises. For example, there may be no difference between "him" and "her", and there may be differences you are not used to. In Arabic there is a special plural form for *two people* as opposed to *more than two*. I cannot begin to prepare you for every possible surprise. This is where published descriptions of the language (or training in linguistics) can be a big help.

Using pictures and physical response drills you can learn to comprehend statements about things in the *past*, *present* and *future*. (Sample instruction: "Show me a picture of a man who is going to sell something.")

You can learn a variety of *complex sentences* including those with relative clauses (sample instruction: "Show me a woman who is walking"), conditional clauses (sample instruction: "If you have more money than me, give me some of your money"), purpose clauses (sample instruction: "Draw a man to show to her"), etc. Other examples are to be found in Thomson (1989, 1993a), Asher (1982), Silvers (1985). Winitz (1982) is a source of ideas for pictures. (Paste blank paper over the English sentences so that they are not a distraction to you or your LRP. You can use the pictures for more purposes than are suggested by the English sentences printed there.) The best source of pictures is photographs of everyday scenes and activities in the community you are entering.

If it is not clear already, you need to carefully prepare for your sessions with your LRP. You will do well to spend at least an hour in preparation for each one hour session with your LRP. The one hour session can then be tape recorded and you can listen to it several times before the next session, and later on for review.

If you are learning a language for which no written grammars exist, or perhaps even if they do exist, you will probably benefit a lot from organizing your observations and thoughts regarding the grammar and sounds of the language. Your own observations, organized your own way, may be more useful to you than the observations of others

which may be written in some dense technical jargon. Spend some time each day writing out any new observations. This can be included in your regular journal writing in which you may describe many aspects of your experience as a language learner working with your LRP, or using the language in the community. Your journal should also include daily observations of the new culture.

So far I have been concentrating on learning to comprehend. The advantage of concentrating initially on learning to comprehend is that you can make very rapid progress. In a month or two you will be able to comprehend hundreds of the most essential vocabulary items, and enough sentence patterns to form the basis of functional speaking ability. If instead you concentrate on memorizing whole sentences or dialogues, along with lists of vocabulary, I can just about guarantee you two things. First, you'll learn a lot less in the same amount of time. Second, you won't be very good at understanding real speech, even when it employs a lot of the items that you have memorized from word lists or in sentences you memorized whole hog. You may be able to say "Where is the bathroom?", only to find that you have no hope of understanding the answer you are given.

But you ask, while I am barreling along learning to comprehend so much, when do I start learning to speak? Personally, I think it is a good idea to start speaking when you have something to say and feel like saying it. You may feel a need to memorize a few sentences lock stock and barrel fairly early. These would be things that you frequently need to say ("Can you tell me where there is a bathroom?"), but which are beyond what you could make up for yourself on the basis of your current ability. These are sometimes called "survival expressions". These will probably include greetings and leave takings, and may include information about yourself, where you are from, and what you are doing.

Once you are well under way in your comprehension learning, you can structure many of your TPR activities around the communication needs you face in real life. For example, if you need to use taxis, your LRP can give you the kinds of instructions you might give a taxi driver, and you can carry them out (charade style, or using a toy car and a home-made map of the city). You'll probably find that the next time you ride in a taxi you'll just start using some of what you learned to comprehend in your language sessions. It will come out naturally, and you will feel like you are speaking the language genuinely, rather than parroting something that you have memorized lock stock and barrel. After all, your goal is to be able to make up whatever sentence you need as you need it, not to memorize enough sentences to cover every possible situation you might encounter. If you want, you can use role-play with your LRP to practice what you will say to the taxi driver. So far, your LRP has played the role of the passenger while you, as driver, responded to her instructions. You now change roles with your LRP and pretend s/he is the taxi driver. Now you give the instructions. But don't try to be fancy. You're a brand new speaker of this language, so speak like a brand new speaker of a language! Don't try to be an unrealistically good speaker for the stage you are at. That may confuse people. You utter an exquisitely memorized sentence, and you get back a torrent of exquisite speech which you can't understand. Utter a halting, simple sentence, and people will speak simply to you, so that you have a chance to understand them, and perhaps learn something new at the same time.

So, now you're (barely) a member of your new speech community. You may not have communicated with many people yet. The overwhelming majority of your actual communication experiences have been with your LRP or LRPs in the sheltered environment of your structured language sessions. Time to think about leaving the nest. To use our earlier metaphor, it's getting hard to remain in the shallow water, because you're trying to dog paddle, but your feet keep bumping the bottom. It's time to spend more time where the water is deeper. As a matter of fact, you have designed your language sessions with this in mind, getting ready for life in the big world.

Branching out: getting a network

Furnham and Bochner (1986) surveyed a wide range of research that had been done on the problems people face when they move into a new culture. They refer to this movement as "culture traveling". I'm really impressed with what they say about the attrition rate among one group of culture travelers, the Peace Corps volunteers:

> The figures are quite startling. The world-wide attrition rate exceeded 40 percent in seven of the years listed…an overall figure of 50 per cent probably reflects the real situation. Given that the participants were volunteers, mostly young and imbued with a spirit of idealism, these data provide clear evidence that culture traveling was not meant to be easy. (p. 137)

And in their concluding chapter they observe:

> …the consensus seems to be that in general terms the negative psychological consequences of culture travel outweigh the positive ones for most categories of travelers…(p. 245)

Hey, don't be a dead hero. Some people really do think they have to jump into those rapids right off the bat. Furnham and Bochner feel you are better off if you initially have a support group consisting of people of similar backgrounds to your own. They admit that such people can be a very poor source of information about the new culture. From my own observations, I would have to warn you that if you allow fellow expatriates (i.e. people like you) to pass on to you negative attitudes toward the society you are trying to enter, it may ruin your whole experience. So you need the support of fellow expatriates who have a positive attitude toward the "host culture". At the same time, having the support of people from your own cultural background clearly reduces the initial stress. Just make sure they are people who love the host society and culture.

At the same time, Furnham and Bochner feel that it will be psychologically damaging to go on and on living in a foreign ghetto (i.e. a ghetto of people like yourself, which might be a physical ghetto, such as a foreigners' compound where you reside and work, or it may be a psychological ghetto, where you depend on foreigners for most of your social support). Personally, I would say that if your only two choices are either to live long term in a foreign ghetto, or else to jump right into the rapids without any support group, then go ahead and jump into the rapids, unless you have no desire to learn the language and become part of the culture, but then, why would you be reading this?

So the ideal, for the non-heroes among us, as well as other people who value their long term mental health, is to begin with a good support group of people who have positive feelings toward the host culture. Immediately, however, you start developing the communication skills and social skills you need to wean yourself from this support group. You develop your early skills in a protected, secure setting with the help of your mediating person *cum* LRP. Little by little, with the help and encouragement of your mediating person and your support group, you will move farther and farther out into the new culture. Eventually, you will develop a new support group consisting of members of the host society, and you will largely wean yourself from your old support group of fellow-foreigners.

But I warn you once more, if the "support group" you start out with turns out to consist of fellow foreigners who sit around and ridicule or run down the host culture, flee for your life. That sort of spirit will kill you dead in your tracks in terms of your cross-cultural effectiveness.

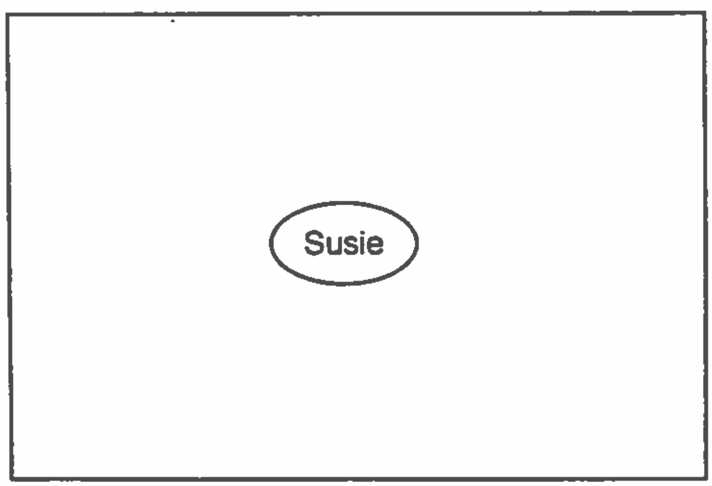
Once again, I'm emphasizing the ideal. Suppose you are learning Mexican Spanish. You might do well to live in a U.S. border town, and recruit a bilingual language LRP on the Mexican side. Of course, you'll be having a fair number of contacts with other Mexicans while going back and forth, but you're not yet attempting to be a full-blown participant in Mexican society. You are, however, building the skills you need to start branching out. Or to take another example, you are planning to learn a minority language in an Asian country. You can already speak the major national language, and participate in the general urban national culture. You are able to live in a town which borders the rural area where the language you wish to learn predominates.

So what you have done so far is to learn a thousand or so basic vocabulary items. You have learned to construct a variety of basic sentences. You have developed some skills for coping with the communication situations you commonly face. You may have been at it for a month, or for two or three months. From the outset, you have been preparing yourself to live in the target language community. As time goes on, you need to think about preparing the community for you. Once people are used to you, and you have acquired some minimal communication skills and social skills, you will be ready to move into the community. One of the ways you will prepare the community for yourself, and help the people to feel comfortable and secure with you in their community is to begin systematically expanding your social network.

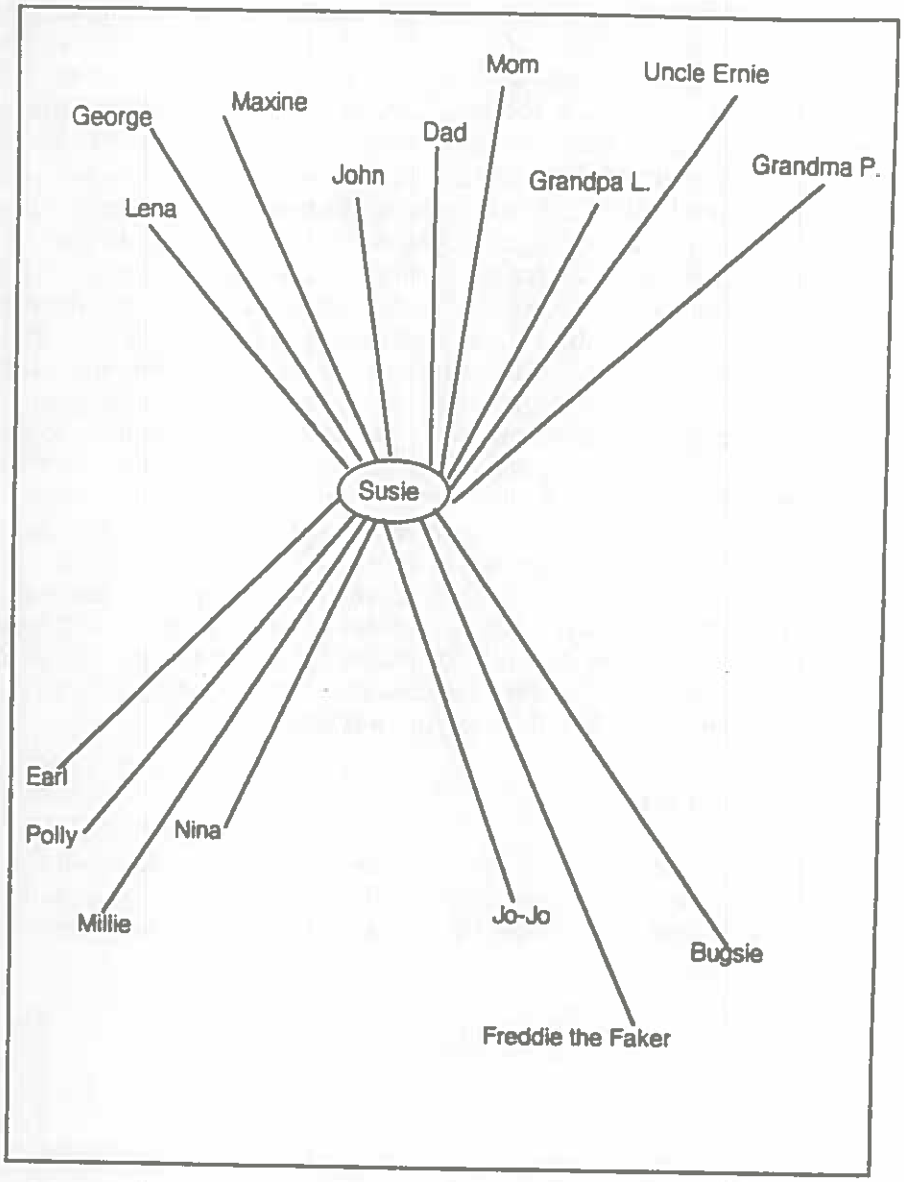
Again, your situation may deviate from the ideal. It may be necessary for you to jump right in, without a lot of opportunity to prepare either yourself or the community. At the other extreme, it may be difficult for you to spend time in the homeland of the language you wish to learn. Whatever the case may be, having an effective strategy for expanding your social network will be to your advantage.

Introduction to social networks

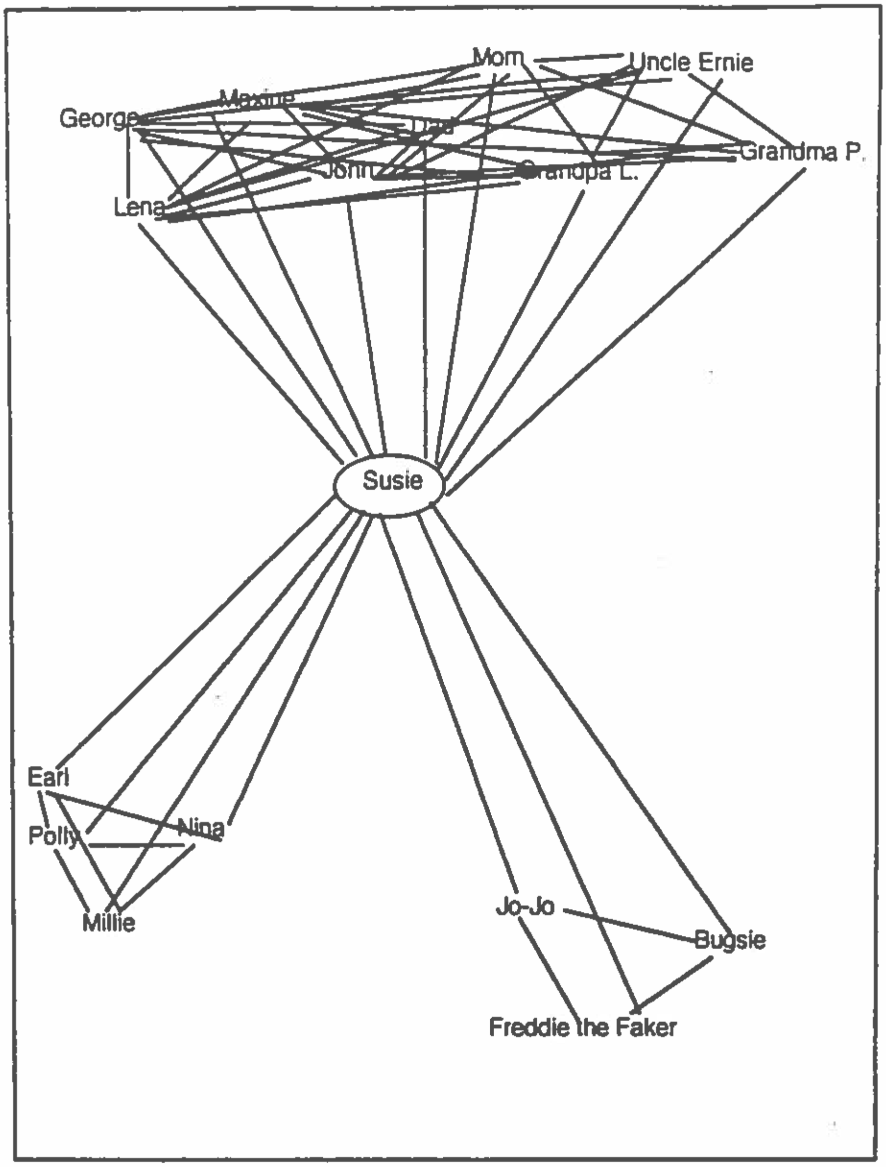
What's a social network you ask? The easiest way to understand this concept is for you to draw a diagram of your present social network. (See Boissevain, 1974, or Milroy, 1987 for more details.) Begin by writing your name in the center of a blank piece of paper:



Now, think of all of the people you interrelate with on a regular basis, and place their names around the same page. (Your full network would include all the people with whom you associate at all, but that would be unmanageable for our present purpose.)



The lines indicate that you associate with each of these people. Now, if that's all there is to it, then it means that you associate with all of those people, but none of them associate with each other. Otherwise, in addition to the lines connecting you to them, there would be lines connecting them to each other. Such a network, in which you are connected to people who are not connected to each other, is referred to as a *diffuse* network. However, it is unlikely that your network is that diffuse. The next thing you need to do is to connect all the people who regularly associate with each other:



If you haven't guessed, the cluster of people at the top is your family. The lower left hand cluster is the people you work with, and the lower right hand cluster is some people you hang around with on the week-ends.

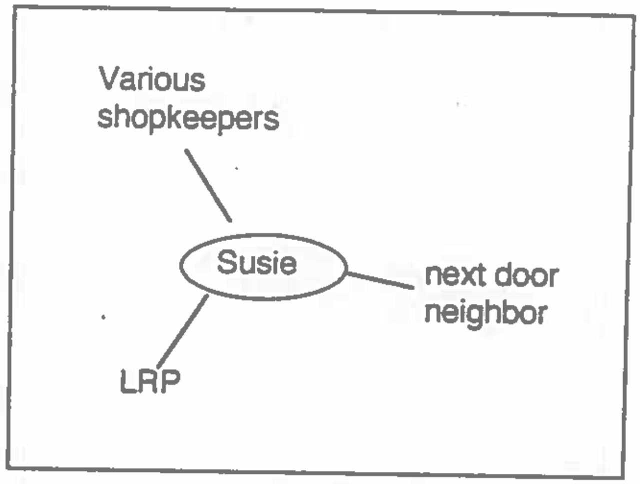
No doubt I've omitted a number of other clusters, like the people you go to church with. And I've omitted unclustered separate individuals, like people you do business with. A real network of a single individual (which is only part of a bigger network involving the whole society) might contain a thousand individuals. But you now have the idea of what a social network is. If your social network has lots of interconnections, like the one above, it is said to be *dense* as opposed to diffuse. The separate clusters are called—you guessed it—*clusters*.

We could make it more complicated by indicating on each connecting line the nature of the relationship, e.g., boss, mother, tennis partner, etc. And you might have several relationships with a single person. For example, your mother might be your boss, and she might also be your tennis partner. Then you have three relationships with her, and your relationship is said to be *multiplex*.

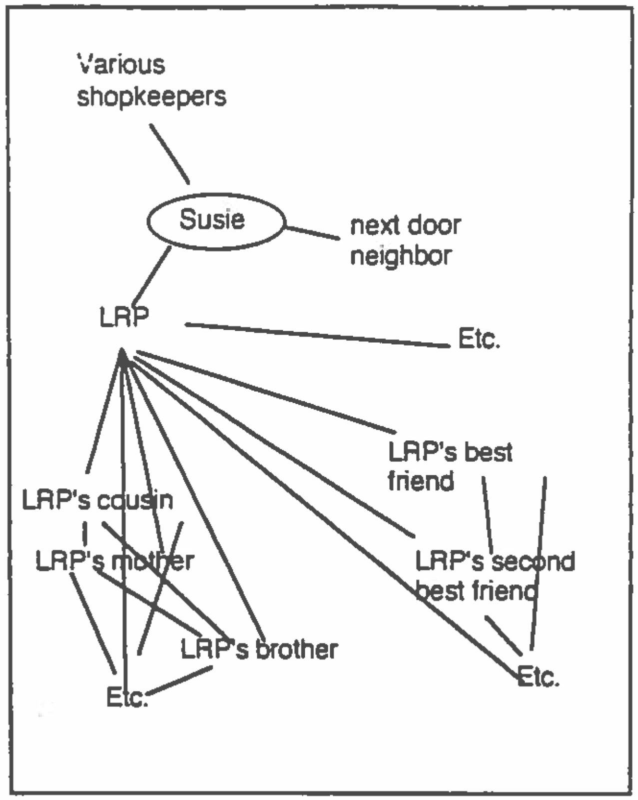
If your network is generally dense and multiplex, then it is considered close knit. Close knit networks are great. Everyone in them feels a strong sense of obligation to everyone else in them. After all, if you hurt Earl's feelings, you don't just risk your relationship with Earl. You also may affect the way Polly, Nina and Millie feel about you. So you're going to be decent to Earl.

Your new social network at the outset

Now so far, your social network in your new language community may look something like this:



Realistically, there may more to it than that already, but let's keep things conceptually simple. Let's assume you only regularly associate with two people in the new language community at this point, not counting the various shopkeepers with whom you do business. I am happy to inform you that you already have more of a social network than you realize. That is because all that is shown in the diagram is your *first order zone*. Those are the people who *you* associate with. But you have a second order zone! Everyone that your LRP associates with is in your second order zone. So is everyone that your next door neighbor regularly associates with, and everyone that your shopkeepers regularly associate with. I'll just illustrate the case of your LRP. Again, we will limit ourselves to your LRP's most regular associates, rather than with the whole thousand associates she might actually have.



Look at all those people in the second order zone of *your social network*. Imagine what the third order zone must be like. For instance, it will include all the associates of your LRP's brother, and all of the associates of your LRP's best friend, even though you have yet to meet your LRP's brother, and your LRP's best friend. Nevertheless, their associates are in the third order zone of *your social network*. (I won't bother you with a diagram of your third order zone. But think how many people are out there in your fourth and fifth order zones. You already are connected to them by chains of people you have not yet met, apart from the very first people in the chains.)

Enlarging and strengthening your network

Your basic strategy for strengthening your social network is to move people from your second zone into your first order zone. You do that simply by establishing contact with them. And you do it in such a way that you become part of one or more clusters.

For example, suppose you were to become friend's with your LRP's best friend: Presto! Your LRP's best friend is now in your first order zone, and you've just become part of a cluster. Now you should have some idea of how you are going to go on expanding your social network. You start from the links you have now, and you follow the links from those people to other people.

There is a good reason to proceed in this manner. Recall the sense of mutual obligation that exists within clusters. If you just go off and start relationships with a whole bunch of people that have no relationships with each other, then their sense of social obligation to you will be weak. But if you find out who the main people are that your LRP (or some other friend) relates to, and get her to introduce you to some of them, then you inherit a lot of the strength of their relationship with your LRP. If they aren't nice to you, their best friend (that is, your LRP) may find out, right?

It may seem selfish to try to force people into being socially obligated to you. But it's not—because you become obligated toward them at the same time. Remember the exchange theory? You enter into a system of rights and obligations which are shared by the members of the clusters you belong to.

Face it. You only have time for a finite number of relationships. While you are network building, you'll be devoting a lot of time to visiting. You can't visit everybody. So why not approach the task systematically. You visit your LRP's best friend. Perhaps your LRP introduces you, or perhaps you just show up and you say, "Hi. You know Noju. She's a good friend of mine." (Noju is your LRP's name, in case you forgot.) Presto! A second order relationship just became a first order relationship in you're social network. Your LRP's friend mentions that her own mother is in the hospital. Now you like to visit the sick. You could visit any old sick person. But can you see that it will strengthen your relationship with your LRP's friend if you visit your LRP's friend's mother? If you are important to your LRP's friends mother, then you are all the more important to your LRP's friend. Try to become important to the people who are important to the other people who you are already becoming important to.

Given the fact that your LRP was a near ideal mediating person, it may be that she has less dense links to her own society (and more links to people outside of the society) than average. Thus your first good cluster may be two or three steps removed from your original LRP. Eventually you would like to participate in clusters which are very deep in the society, where you are the only foreigner with whom the others in the cluster are linked. This is because people like your LRP may already have a fixed concept of "a foreigner" which is hard for you to overcome. The members of clusters which are deeply embedded in the society may have no fixed concept of the role of a foreigner, and thus it is more likely that they will simply include you as one of them. In that way you'll become a true participant in the society, rather than a hybrid person on the fringe.

This concept of network building is simple enough, but if you don't approach it systematically, you may well use up all your social time forming a very diffuse network of a whole bunch of people who have little or no significance to each other. Better to relate to the same number of people, but choose them strategically so that they form a dense network.

You can also work at making your network multiplex. That is, now that your LRP's best friend is your friend, you have the relationship of *friend* with that person. It may also happen that she is your neighbor, which means that you stand in two relationships to her, friend and neighbor. Suppose you learn that she belongs to a knitting club. You might join it. Now you have the third relationship of fellow-club member. The point is, besides building your relationships around people who relate to each other, try to relate to some of those people in a variety of capacities. To some extent this follows automatically from spending a lot of time with people.

If you end up belonging to two or three clusters, with a variety of types of relationships in each one, then you have a close-knit network, which means that you are a true insider in the community. You're a belonger. You're extra important to people because you're important to people who are important to them independently of you. Nobody's going to take you for granted. Even people that aren't in your first or second order zones will see that you're a belonger, and will feel more of a sense of responsibility to accept you and protect you than they otherwise might. And they'll be more secure in their recognition that you accept them. I also think that you will find this approach to network building interesting and enjoyable. If you're not very outgoing, you'll probably find this to be a less traumatic approach to building relationships than certain alternatives such as just going out and knocking on doors and saying, "Hi. You don't know me, but can I be your friend?"

We often think of the stress of culture traveling only in terms of what we experience as the culture travelers. You also cause stresses to the community you enter. The metaphor of jumping into the rapids breaks down here, because it is not just hard on

the jumper. It is also unkind to the rapids. While you are learning your early language skills and social skills under the shelter and protection of your mediating person, not only do you have a chance to prepare for the community. You also give the community a chance to become aware of you, and start getting prepared for your presence.

Coping with some less than ideal situations

Perhaps you would like to begin learning your new language by finding a bilingual mediating person who will later help you to systematically build a dense and multiplex network somwhere near the core of society, except for one small problem: you find that it is impossible.

Learning in a truly monolingual society

It may be that you have no choice but to jump in at the rapids. That is, you are unable to contact any bilingual mediating person, and unable to remain on or near the fringe of the community while preparing both yourself and the community for your fuller participation in its life. You should still be able to apply many of the principles I have been describing, if you give it some thought. You will still expect that your first LRP(s) will be people who live nearer the edge of their society, or at least are temperamentally so disposed, being open-minded, outward-reaching individuals. You can also do a lot of comprehension learning, starting with the names of simple actions and objects, and using photos or drawings. If you must be exposed to a whole community all at once, you might as well meet everybody. You're probably less of a threat, and source of stress, if you are a known (albeit strange) quantity than if you are some mysterious figure lurking in the shadows. In such situations you need all the preparation you can get in terms of linguistic and anthropological training.

A word of warning is in order. I have seen people behave as though they faced such a situation when they really did not. Some people may believe that it is preferable to live in a monolingual immersion situation from day one. I have seen it done both ways, even by different people learning the same language. The person who worked for several weeks with a bilingual LRP on the fringe of the community and then moved into a monolingual setting had a dramatic advantage over the person who jumped right into the monolingual situation. Now there is a third possibility: you might remain in the bilingual, fringe situation forever, and never move into the monolingual situation. That would be tragic indeed. If the only choice were between this tragic third possibility, and the first possibility of immediate monolingual immersion, by all means, go for the immediate monolingual situation. But if you have the opportunity to start out with a bilingual LRP, and you have a definite strategy for moving into the monolingual community in due time, then you have the best possible situation, assuming you don't get cold feet when the time comes to move into the monolingual community. If you make yourself accountable to someone, and take that accountability seriously, you will overcome those cold feet.

Learning in a totally bilingual society

Another difficult case is the one where there simply is no monolingual community available period. You may wish to learn the language of a community that is totally, or at least largely, bilingual. Perhaps they are far more proficient in their first language than in the language which you share with them, but it will take you a long time to reach the point where you can communicate more comfortably with them in their first language than in their second language which may be, in the worst possible case, your mother

tongue. In this case especially, you may appreciate the possibility of doing extensive comprehension learning (learning to comprehend a wide range of language related to a wide range of topics as used in a wide range of functions). Thomson (1992, 1993a,b) contains some suggestions along these lines.

Once you know a thousand or so basic vocabulary items, and are familiar with a range of basic constructions in the language, you will want to have specific times in which you behave monolingually with your LRP. Initially, this might involve a "monolingual hour" once or twice per week, and later it might involve a "monolingual week" once in awhile, and eventually, "a monolingual month". Your LRP will have a much easier time being "monolingual" with you than anyone else, since she has the best possible feel for your current level of language ability, and can gear herself to it. It may be best to do your serious network building after you have reached the point where you can get along (by hook or by crook) entirely in the new language. It may be hard to change the language in which a relationship is conducted once the relationship is well established. Once you are functional in your early "broken" form of the new language, you can build perfectly fine relationships in it. This may make you uncomfortable at first. You may feel that you are making a fool of yourself conversing in the new language when you could be being your old familiar groovy self by speaking your stronger language (which may even be your mother tongue), since they speak your stronger language better than you can even dream of speaking their language at this point. You may have a strong feeling that you are not putting communication first when you struggle to communicate in a language you hardly know rather than easily expressing yourself in a language you both know well. What you need to bear in mind in this situation is that learning a new language means becoming a new "you". The "you" that speaks broken Navajo may be the only you that most of your Navajo friends will ever meet. That does not make you any less of a genuine person. But becoming someone you have never been before may make you awfully uncomfortable! How badly do you want to learn this language?

Language Learning when there is limited access to the society

The third less-than-ideal case I want to address is the one where you must learn the new language at a great distance from the homeland of that language. Suppose your LRP and you live thousands of miles from any significant segment of the language community. If you are serious about learning the language, you will want to plan forays into the homeland. Now the matter of timing becomes crucial. Suppose that in terms of time and finances you can only afford a three month foray into the homeland of the language you are learning. Later on you hope to make additional forays, but the future is not at all clear in that regard. Want to waste most of the potential benefit of those three months? Then why don't you just go on over there before you've even learned the first bit of the language. That way you can spend a good part of your three months grunting and pointing and writing things down in your little notebook. Want to get a lot of benefit out of those same three months? Then before going, make a point of learning to *use* a couple thousand vocabulary items, both as a comprehender and as a producer of sentences. And perhaps you can learn to communicate (by means of role-play with your LRP) in a wide range of communication situations, before you make the trip. In other words, by working with your LRP to develop basic communication skills—i.e., the ability to understand and produce sentences you have never heard before—you can prepare yourself for three months of meaningful communication, during which you can get to know a lot of people and participate in the culture first hand with a lot of understanding.

The point is, you can develop a lot of real communication ability before you go, as long as you have at least one person to communicate with in your cozy little speech community of two people. Don't spend your preparation time mainly reading about the

language if you can be learning to use it. And learn about the culture in the language, as you are learning the language, rather than just reading about it in some other language (like English). When you arrive in that distant homeland, do you want to arrive as someone who knows a lot about the language, or do you want to arrive as a communicator (albeit a broken communicator). So get busy using the language with your LRP. Then when you arrive on the scene you'll be in a position to wring the maximum benefit out of the few weeks in terms improving your fluency and experiencing the culture.

Besides poor timing, another easy error to make is to spend your time in the homeland of your new language doing things that you could do as well or better in your own homeland. This is not the time to start writing a book, for instance, or to write technical papers about the language or culture (or anything else). It is not even the time to start constructing a fancy dictionary of the language you are learning. If you are a linguist, this is not the time to start typing texts into your computer and interlinearizing them. (If you're not a linguist, forget I said that). You have a few precious weeks to experience the language and culture in its proper setting. Don't get sidetracked. There will be plenty of time later for those other worthwhile projects.

In any of these less-than-ideal situations you can apply the principles of network-building, starting with whatever contacts you have or are able to make and attempting to work out from there. You meet Joe. You learn that Joe has a friend named Bob. Just being able to tell Bob, "I know your friend Joe" is enough to validate you and give you an entrance into Bob's life. At the same time, entering Bob's life strengthens your relationship with Joe. Then you work outward from Bob and Joe, or any other starting points you might have. Don't be afraid to get new, independent contacts as new starting points. But don't spend all your time pursuing new, independent relationships, or you will end up with a diffuse network, rather than ending up as a belonger in the new society.

My network is growing and strengthening—now what?

Getting back to your social network, recall that what you are doing is becoming part of a speech community. You need to keep in mind both the *community* part, and the *speech* part. In Thomson (1993b), I point out that getting to know the people whose language you are learning, including learning their deep seated feelings of what constitutes right and wrong behaviour, is actually a central part of learning the language.

Bootstrapping your way to good behaviour

In a way, learning to behave in your new community is like lifting yourself by your own bootstraps. The bull needs to follow the rules of the china shop community , but can only learn the rules by first being a part of the community!.Poor china shop!

Think about what it means to participate in a community. It means that, to a reasonable extent, you operate according to the unwritten contract that defines membership in that community. You and others in your community share many values and assumptions. For example, you may all share assumptions about which side of the road people will drive on. Someone who follows different assumptions regarding where to drive cannot be considered to be a smoothly functioning participant in the community. There are countless assumptions of less obvious sorts which are shared, usually at a subconscious level, by members of the community. These assumptions form the rules of the game for participation in the social life of the community. The language of the community is a special case of these shared rules. Not only are there rules related to how to form different types of phrases and sentences. There are rules about how and when to use particular types of sentences. In my current community, for example, I can make a

statement such as "I'll visit you on Tuesday evening." In some communities such a blunt prediction of the future may be a violation of the rules, especially if I am talking about the distant future, as in "Next year, I will build a new house."

How do you learn the thousands of rules of the game which make you a participant in the new community? That is where your bootstraps come in. You can only learn the rules through extensive participation. But to participate you are supposed to follow the rules. Fortunately, in most cases, this isn't as difficult as it sounds. When you started participating in your first culture as a baby, no one expected you to behave like an adult from the outset. Early on you learned to get by with some bare bones, like "please" and "thank-you". You'd probably be surprised at how little you actually say "please" and "thank-you" now. In place of "thank-you" as we noted earlier, you have numerous expressions of gratitude: "You shouldn't have!"; "How nice of you!"; etc. The use of these different politeness formulas is finely tuned to factors such as who you are talking to, their status in relation to yours, the nature of the act of kindness, and so on.

The rules of social interaction, like the rules of grammar, go far beyond what you or anyone else can hope to consciously analyze and understand. For the most part you will simply absorb the rules through extensive participation in the community. To the extent that you can make conscious discoveries of the rules, you will benefit from doing so. The same applies to reading (with a measure of caution) about the rules, especially in the works of by anthropologists, sociolinguists and intercultural communication experts . That may help you to get your initial bare bones, and then some. Learning several formulas for making polite requests, for example, will help you to demonstrate to people that you really do intend to be a properly behaved participant in community life.

But like a new child, you won't start out acting like an adult member of the community. You'll start out acting like a foreign weirdo. A basic rule of culture learning is that you will never be present in a new culture as a normal person unless you are first willing to be present as a weirdo. Weirdness is the only path to normalcy. But you do want to minimize the damage. Minimizing the damage was part of the reason you started learning in the sheltered context of private language sessions with your LRP. You have now developed some communication skills. People can now talk to you with some hope of being understood, at least if they work at it. In addition you know various ways to signal that you do indeed intend to be friendly and polite. But you have a long way to go to reach the point where you seldom or never act weird.

Systematic language learning in your new speech community

You'll want to continue formal language sessions even while you are branching out in your social life. In addition, you will be able to use some of your social visiting as a means of formally or semiformally working on language and culture learning. However, much of your visiting and participating in daily life should be just that. So then, as you are enriching your social life, you have a three-fold language learning strategy: 1) learning more in formal sessions with your LRP; 2) getting specific help from friends in the context of social visiting; 3) learning through social visiting and otherwise participating in community life.

How do you decide what to learn with your LRP as you keep progressing? First, you will want to put a lot of thought into your specific communicative needs. Second, you will want to continue working on your general communicative ability.[2]

---

[2] In Thomson (1993b) I deal with the topics of this section in more detail. Larson (1984), Part III provides an excellent guide to the areas to cover in language learning when language learning is viewed as part of a process ever deepening integration into the community that uses the language.

What should I learn next?

Get a pencil and paper. Think of all the communicative needs you have experienced in recent weeks. In what situations have you needed to be able to comprehend the language? In what situations have you needed to speak the language? What topics have you needed to understand? You may find that you have listed things like "dealing with requests for bribes; explaining my reason for being here; listening to political speeches", and so forth. Brainstorm with fellow language learners if possible. Make your list of communication needs as long as you can. Now, having listed your past needs, see if there are any additional communication needs that are currently coming up. Finally, add any needs to the list which you see arising in the intermediate or distant future. Once you've made an extensive list of your own past, present, and future communication needs, make a note for each need as to how serious a need it is in your life at this time. Some needs may not be all that serious, strictly speaking, but they may nevertheless be important to you personally. So for each need, make a second note as to how important it is to you personally. Finally, for each communication need in your list, make a note as to how much communication ability you have already developed in that area. For any area that constitutes a pressing need, or a strong personal desire, and where your current ability is clearly limited, you then design a plan of attack, which may involve activities in your sessions with your LRP, or during social visits, or in other contexts. (This basic approach to needs analysis is found in Dickinson, 1987.)

For example, suppose one of your needs is to read the newspaper in the new language. As you reflect on it, you feel it is not a really pressing need. That is, nothing in your life or work requires that you read the newspaper. At the same time, it is something that is important to you personally, for whatever reasons. You note that at the present time you have very little ability in this area. For your plan of attack you decide that for the next little while you and your LRP will use part of each language session to read the newspaper together. You find that quite a bit of vocabulary is specific to newspaper language, and so you work at using this vocabulary with your LRP in discussing the articles you read. In addition, while visiting socially, you plan to take a few minutes to discuss certain news items with various friends. Finally, you spend time in the evenings reading the newspaper on your own. Of course, this is a hypothetical example. You may never need or wish to read the newspaper in the language you are learning, particularly if there are no newspapers. The point is, identify your needs, plan your attack, and carry it out.

Your communicative needs may relate to situations in which you need to communicate: funerals, feasts, meeting a stranger on the path. Or they may relate to topics that you need to be able to comprehend and talk about: farming, hunting, trips to the city. As you redo your needs analysis once in awhile, you will discover that you have developed some ability in certain areas, but are feeling increased need in other areas. This will help to guide your ongoing language learning activities.

CARRYING THE LANGUAGE SESSIONS INTO REAL-LIFE ENCOUNTERS

Whatever you learn with your LRP, you now reinforce in your social visiting. Suppose you are learning to talk about farming, or perhaps some small aspect of one type of farming. You have taken appropriate photos, and discussed these in detail with your LRP. You now go on social visits planning to reinforce what you have learned. It will not be good to give the impression that this is all you have come for. Remember the exchange theory. You are building relationships. As you give of your time in normal social visiting, there will be intangible benefits to the people you visit. The very interest you show in people's lives and needs can be one of these intangible benefits to them. You may also provide tangible benefits. At the same time, you will make it clear that you

are receiving benefits from them whenever they help you to learn more of the language and culture, and during most visits you devote some time to this. This might mean getting out those farming photos, and discussing the things you have just learned to discuss with your language LRP. As you become really thick with people, and incur lots of obligations, you should be more daring in getting help with your language learning from your friends. For example, you might find two of your friends together, and clip a lapel microphone on each of them, attached to your pocket stereo recorder, and get them to discuss the pictures. You can make a game of it, for example, where one person "thinks of a picture" and the other tries to guess which one. In this way you can expand your collection of tape recorded conversations which you can listen to privately to reinforce what you are learning. The point is, be a friend. Give a lot. Get a lot (including a lot of help with language and culture learning).

LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE IN GENERAL

In addition to working on the specific areas where you know you have special communicative needs, you must also be concerned with your general communicative ability. When I have helped language learners do needs analyses in the manner described above, I have commonly found that people express a certain need which they variously verbalize: ability to chit chat; ability to make small talk; ability to participate in general conversations; ability to socialize with neighbors. This doesn't exactly qualify as a "specific" need. How do you learn to talk with people in general on any of the topics that people generally talk about? That would appear to mean being able to talk about "all of life". How do you get on with learning to talk about "all of life"?

To some extent, you develop this ability through thousands of hours of being with people who are talking about whatever things people talk about, assuming you can understand them if you try hard enough. For a long time, once you can understand people at all, you can only understand when they make a special effort to include you in the conversation. Remember, it costs other people something for you to learn their language. As time goes on, less and less effort will be required for people to include you in conversation. Eventually you will be able to readily follow many conversations which you merely happen to overhear. Extensive exposure to people's ordinary conversations is essential if you are to become an ordinary conversationalist. To the extent that you can tape record people's speech for repeated listening you can accelerate your learning significantly since you can spend many hours listening to the tapes when you are not able to be listening to people, and some tapes will become increasingly intelligible to you on each hearing.

There are also more specific strategies for improving your ability to deal with "all of life". Much of people's ease in communication derives from the fact that they share a huge bank of common knowledge and experience which is specific to members of that community. You need to accelerate your acquisition of that knowledge bank. This means going beyond you specific (and narrow) communicative needs as discussed above, and doing a survey of general areas of knowledge in the community. What geographical knowledge do people have? What knowledge do they share regarding the organization of people into groups, and the relationships between people? What religious beliefs are widely shared? What are the major events in a day, week, year, and lifetime? What occupational or recreational skills are generally known to members of the community? There will also be areas of specialized knowledge. For instance, motor-rickshaw drivers have a body of shared knowledge that may not be important to me unless I wish to hang around with rickshaw drivers. By contrast, everybody may share a more restricted body of knowledge regarding the *use* of rickshaws.

Systematically expanding you cultural knowledge

One helpful concept in tackling the general knowledge bank is the social situation, as described in Spradley (1980). A social situation consists of a *place*, the *actors* who act in that place, and the *activities* those actors perform in that place. An example is boarding a rickshaw. The place is in a street, at a rickshaw. The actors are the driver and the (potential) passengers. The activities include the driver and passenger establishing contact, the approach, the driver stopping the motor (if it's going), the statement of the desired destination, the driver's indication of willingness to go to that destination, the negotiation of the fare, the invitation to board, the actual boarding, etc. If you take a tour around your community you should be able to identify scores of social situations which you can then learn to discuss.

Spradley (1979) nicely complements Spradley (1980). I consider these two books to be among the most helpful for intermediate and advanced language learners. Spradley (1979) describes the types of questions which you can ask of your LRP or friends which will generate a lot of discussion of cultural knowledge. For example, in asking a *grand tour question* of the rickshaw driver, I asked him to tell me everything he did in a typical day. Then I asked him to tell me everything he could remember having done on a recent day. Many of the events he referred to formed the basis of further questions. Some of these were mini-tour questions, such as "What are all the steps in starting the rickshaw".

I suggested before that this brought out the specialized knowledge of rickshaw drivers, rather than general knowledge shared by all members of the community. In fact, however, I did acquire considerable general knowledge. For example, I learned why some drivers refused to give me a ride, which I'm sure everyone else already knew. In addition, I found that much of what I learned carried over from rickshaws to a variety of other modes of public transportation (horse drawn tongas, minitaxis, Suzuki pick-ups, taxis, vans, and three kinds of busses). Suddenly I could make intelligent small talk with Suzuki drivers. My new share in the local knowledge bank was paying off in my general conversational ability.

FOCUSING ON SOCIAL SKILLS

A special group of social situations are the ones which you find particularly stressful or anxiety-provoking. This may include situations in which you have gotten into conflicts, or experienced unpleasant friction on one or more occasions, or situations in which you have felt especially awkward or embarrassed. Furnham and Bochner (1986) trace the experience of culture-shock to such situations. They suggest that culture-stress or culture-shock results from the fact that the culture traveler is lacking in specific social skills. Working with your LRP or friends, you can go over such situations in detail. A useful technique is to have two friends role-play that they are in the situation that causes you stress. Tape-record (or video-record) them. Listen to the tape a number of times. Then do the role-play yourself with your LRP or a friend. We have moved back into the area of more specific communicative needs, but in the context of discussing social situations, it is important that we highlight this special variety.

FOCUSING ON LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

Another aspect of general communicative ability is the ability to use language for a variety of functions. Moran (1990) includes the following examples of language functions: greetings, leave takings, interrupting, apologizing, answering the door, begging, refusing, declining an offer, offering help, requesting help, consoling, thanking, warning, making an introduction, responding to an introduction, asking directions, complimenting, expressing condolences, extending an invitation, expressing distaste,

answering the telephone, expressing delight, expressing displeasure, congratulating, expressing pain, expressing fear, requesting permission, getting someone's attention, asking for repetition, expressing ignorance, encouraging, accusing, seeking reassurance, expressing fear, remembering, welcoming, asking about health, requesting permission to speak, reprimanding, expressing disappointment, expressing affection, calming someone down. (For these and other language functions Moran presents comic style story strips with the speech bubbles empty so that they can be used for any language.)

AVOIDING FOSSILIZATION

A final important aspect of your general communicative ability has to do with your language ability in the narrowest sense. How's your Chukchee? Think of people who have learned your native language as adults. Let's say that is English. There is a general impression that new speakers of English speak "broken English". What is the opposite of broken English? I want to say that the opposite of broken English is "fluent English". Ideally, a new speaker should start out speaking broken English, and end up speaking fluent English. Unfortunately, there is a third possibility. Many adult learners of English will end up speaking what we might call "fluent broken English". That is, native speakers of English can generally understand them without difficulty, and they themselves can rattle on in their limited English a mile a minute. In technical terms, such people have fossilized. They have become very fluent in using very limited resources. You can fossilize in your new language if you wish. All you have to do is learn a few hundred of the most frequent vocabulary items, and a few dozen basic sentence patterns. You can then develop a special genius for using those limited resources to communicate almost any conceivable meaning. You find roundabout ways to express most meanings, and simply avoid talking about other things, or get people to help you when you get stuck. (These are examples of *communication strategies*; see Bialystok, 1990). Since you're using so few words and even fewer sentence patterns, you use them zillions of times, and thus become very "fluent" in your use of them. Your really can speak quickly. Since I don't know the language at all, I'll conclude from listening to you that you are very fluent indeed. Native speakers will know otherwise, though they may claim that you speak their language better than they do. People are so kind.

The alternative to fossilizing is to become truly fluent in the best sense of the word. If you are pressing on, learning to talk about all of life, and more importantly, learning to understand most of what is said around you in most situations (assuming you are in a lot of speech situations), you have not yet fossilized. But one special area of concern is learning to speak the language accurately. Early on, it is hard enough to speak the language at all, without worrying too much about speaking it perfectly. It is widely believed by experts that it would be counterproductive at that stage if all of your friends tried to correct or improve upon everything you try to say. It would be discouraging, if not debilitating. You need the rewarding feeling of successful communication experiences to keep your morale and motivation up. So in many situations it is best to concern yourself with *what* you want to say rather than to get hung up on exactly *how* you are saying it. But then, how are you going to learn where your mistakes are, and overcome them?

For this I have two suggestions. One useful technique is to record your own speech from time to time. For example, you may tell a story to your LRP. Your LRP listens politely and interacts normally. All of this is captured on tape. Then you go over the tape with your LRP and she points out places where your speech could be improved. This could involve pronunciation or grammar or vocabulary. I find it helpful to write out each instance, placing what I said in one column, and the LRP's corrected version in another column. The other approach to improving your accuracy in grammar and vocabulary is to work on *writing*, that is on *composition*. The things that you write sit

there forever and stare you in the face. Your LRP can point out errors or suggest improvements. You can keep a log of these errors and suggestions. As you keep at it, your writing will become more and more accurate with respect to grammar and usage.

But it sounds so hard.

As I have been describing your language learning activities, I have been envisioning you as a deliberate, reflective language learner. Now alternatively, you can just barrel on into the community and let whatever happens happen, and live with the results. It should be clear that you are much better off if your life as a language learner is governed by frequent planning, evaluation and strategizing. In closing, I would like to highlight some key aspects of this deliberate, reflective approach to becoming part of a new speech community, including learning its language.

YOUR TIME COMMITMENT

First of all, it may have sounded as though I thought you had nothing to do but learn the language. Good. That's how it should have sounded. "Help!" you exclaim. The world doesn't work like that. If not, then do the best you can. In the ideal situation you would spend two full years concerning yourself with nothing except becoming a member of that new speech community. That may be possible if you're planning a long career in that location, and being fluent in the language and comfortable in the culture are essential to your career. But if you only plan to be in the situation for five years, it may be difficult to spend two years doing language and culture learning. A second ideal to fall back to is to use the first one fifth of your projected time in the situation for language and culture learning. Your increased effectiveness and happiness during the remaining four fifths of your time will more than repay the initial time investment. The $\frac{1}{5}:\frac{4}{5}$ rule would seem to me to be valid whether your total stay is going to be for five years (one year of full-time language and culture learning), for two years (five months full time), for one year (ten weeks full time) or for a month (one week full time language learning at the outset). Of course, if you only plan to be there one month, and have only a week for full-time language learning, you won't be trying to rapidly develop comprehension ability for a thousand words! More likely, you'll mainly memorize a bunch of useful sentences, and some of the most essential vocabulary. If you have two or three months for full-time language learning, you can proceed pretty much as I have suggested. If you are really serious, your full-time language learning will be followed by regular part time language learning.

WHEN TO START

It is extremely important that your concentrated language learning period begin as early as possible during your sojourn. The longer you wait, the more you find ways to function without using the new language, and the more you become comfortable as a nonspeaker. It takes tremendous motivation and enthusiasm to conquer a new language. Once you are starting to become comfortable in the new context without the language, your motivation may no longer be strong enough to carry you through to successful language learning. And after culture-stress has had several months to wear you down, your enthusiasm will become hard to muster. When you first arrive in the situation you are on a language learning adrenaline high. Cash in on it. Let the momentum from your early energy carry you as far as possible. This is your best chance. Things will only get worse. Go for it.

Keep in mind that when I say "full-time language and culture learning", I am including your network building and extensive social visiting and other participation in the culture as part of what fills the full time. Socializing is not something in addition to your work. It is a crucial part of your work.

STAYING ENCOURAGED

Now even if you do have several months available for full-time language and culture learning, you may find it hard to imagine yourself exercising the self-discipline to carefully plan all of your language sessions, and regularly do your needs analysis, and come up with new plans of attack for new needs, and carefully build your social network, and incorporate your learning into your social visiting. You may even cringe at the idea of doing a lot of socializing (or maybe at the idea of doing a lot of planning). How will you ever pull all that off? If you think you are going to go it alone, you may well lose heart fairly quickly. You need encouragement and accountability. You can arrange this with a fellow language learner who shares some of the basic concepts you are employing. Better yet, you could arrange to make yourself accountable to someone who specializes in encouraging language learners. You will share your plans and goals with this person and get feedback. Your goals will be specific ones, such as "This month I am going to start spending time with these three people, so that I will have a second clear cluster of relationships in my social network." Then you will report on the steps you took to achieve this goal.

DON'T GET STUCK ON YOUR WAY TO FIRST BASE

Commonly, the recruitment of the initial LRP can be a big hurdle. If the right person does not easily emerge (or if no person easily emerges), you may need to begin by doing a bit of network building and creating some initial sense of mutual obligations with a number of people. I personally find a lot of internal resistance to doing all I should to recruit the necessary help that I need, and I have observed this same problem in many others. This is another area where specific accountability and even outside intervention can be crucial. Oddly, I would love to recruit the necessary help for you. I only hate recruiting help for myself. I know I am not alone in this.

Conclusion

Believe me, if you have the right help and encouragement, and apply yourself to regular planning, you'll find it isn't as hard as you might think. Once you get good at it, you may never want to do anything else, which would raise other problems. Learning a language is exciting. When you are first exposed to the new language, it is like a movie that is so out of focus that it is a meaningless gray blur. As you keep learning, it is as though someone is turning the lens, and the pictures start to appear and be recognizable, until you are able to follow everything going on in the movie. It really is fun. You just can't do it by yourself. You don't just learn a language. You become part of a human social organism for which the language is the life blood, and then you live as part of that social organism by means of that language.

I've urged that you let a segment of your old community launch you into your new community, and become part of the new community in a sane and gentle manner. You are gently pushed and gently pulled, and you do your part as well. There is no such thing as lonely language learning. Language learning starts with community and ends with community. Each language and culture is a marvelous expression of humanity,

another facet of the same jewel. It is an awesome privilege to be able to express ones humanity in new ways. Culture travelers, especially long term sojourners who learn new languages, are a privileged lot. If you have the opportunity, make the most of it.

References

Asher, J. J. (1982). *Learning another language through actions*. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions.

Bialystok, E. (1990). *Communication Strategies*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Bochner, S. (Ed.). (1981). *The mediating person*. Boston: G.K. Hall and Co.

Boissevain, J. (1974). *Friends of friends: Networks, manipulators and coalitions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Dickinson, L. (1987). *Self-instruction in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Furnham, A., & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture shock: Psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments*. London: Methuen.

Homans, G. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, *62*, 597-606.

Larson, D. N. (1984) *Guidelines for barefoot language learning*. Fresno, CA: Link Care.

Milroy, L. (1987). *Language and social networks* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Moran, P. R. (1990). *Lexicarry: An illustrated vocabulary builder for second languages*. Brattleboro, VT: Pro Lingua Associates.

Saussure, de, F. (1959). *Course in General Linguistics* (Wade Baskin [1st French edition, 1916], Trans.). New York: The Philosophical Library.

Silvers, S. M. (1985). *Listen and perform: Total physical response activities for beginning and intermediate ESL students*. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Spradley, J. P., & McCurdy, D. W. (Ed.). (1984). *Conformity and conflict*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company.

Taft, R. (1981). The role and personality of the mediator. In S. Bochner (Eds.), *The mediating persom* Boston: G.K. Hall and Co.

Thomson, G. (1989). The use of a book of photos in early comprehension learning. In unpublished ms.:

Thomson, G. (1992). Developing a corpus of comprehensible text. Ms.

Thomson, G.. (1993a). Kick-starting your language learning: Becoming a basic speaker through fun and games inside a secure nest. Ms.

Thomson, G. (1993b). Language learning in the real world for non-beginners. Ms.

Winitz, H. (1982). *Language through pictures*. Kansas City, MO: International Linguistics Corporation.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations* (Anscombe, G.E.M., Trans.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Illustration 1.1.
Oral Proficiency Rating Scales

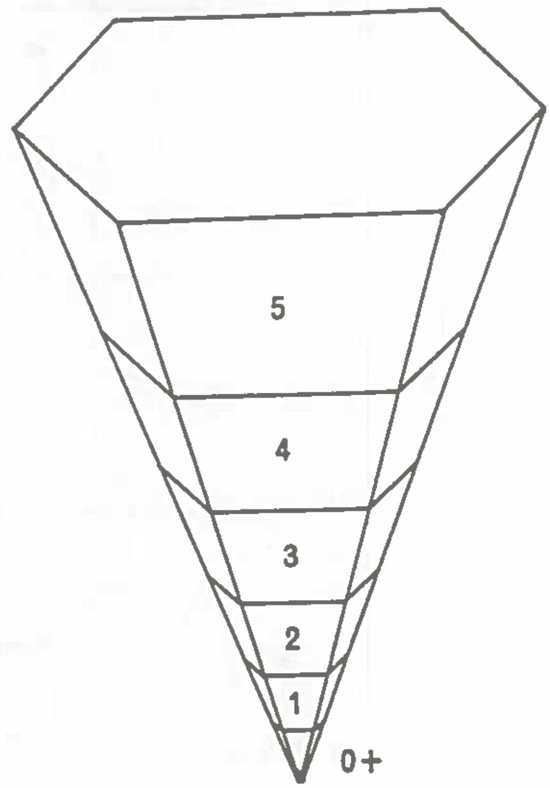
Government (FSI) Scale	Academic (ACTFL/ETS) Scale	Definition
5	Native	Able to speak like an educated native speaker
4+ 4 3+ 3	Superior	Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations
2+	Advanced Plus	Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics
2	Advanced	Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements
1+	Intermediate—High	Able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands
1	Intermediate—Mid	Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands
	Intermediate—Low	Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements
0+	Novice—High	Able to satisfy immediate needs with learned utterances
0	Novice—Mid	Able to operate in only a very limited capacity
	Novice—Low	Unable to function in the spoken language
	0	No ability whatsoever in the language

Source: Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro. *ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual*. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1982.

of *accuracy* with which the message can be communicated for each level on the scale.

As the proficiency levels for speaking are explained in more detail below, it will become clear how the components of communicative com-

Illustration 1.2.
Inverted Pyramid of Language Proficiency



Source: Pardee Lowe. *Manual for Language School Oral Interview Workshops.* Washington, D.C.: Defense Language Institute/Language School Joint Oral Interview Transfer Project, 1982.

petence mentioned by Canale (1983) and others can be measured within the context of this trisection. The criterion *accuracy*, for example, relates not only to linguistic structures, but also to precision of vocabulary, the use of cohesive devices, the appropriate use of register and other sociolinguistic factors, and so on. In this manner, the proficiency descriptions are a direct reflection of current thinking about the nature of communicative competence and can be used to quantify to some extent the elements of the definitions given earlier.

For those unfamiliar with the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* and the ACTFL/ETS Scale, the following shorthand characteristics of each proficiency range should prove helpful. It is important to bear in mind that these descriptions reflect data collected from oral interviews carried out over the past 40 years. That is, they are experientially, rather than hypothetically based: they describe how language learners *typically* function along a whole range of possible levels of competence rather than prescribe the way any given theorist *thinks* learners ought to function. (The actual

Oral Proficiency Level	Function	Context	Accuracy
	(Tasks accomplished, attitudes expressed, tone conveyed)	(Topics, subject areas, activities, and jobs addressed)	(Acceptability, quality, and accuracy of message conveyed)
5	Functions equivalent to an educated native speaker	All subjects	Performance equivalent to an educated native speaker
4	Able to tailor language to fit audience, counsel, persuade, negotiate, represent a point of view, and interpret for dignitaries	All topics normally pertinent to professional needs	Nearly equivalent to an educated native speaker; speech is extensive, precise, appropriate to every occasion, with only occasional errors
3	Can converse in formal and informal situations, resolve problems, situations, deal with unfamiliar topics, provide explanations, describe in detail, offer supported opinions, and hypothesize	Practical, social, professional, and abstract topics, particular interests, and special fields of competence	Errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker; only sporadic errors in basic structure
2	Able to fully participate in casual conversations, can express facts, give instructions, describe, report, and provide narration about current, past, and future activities	Concrete topics such as own background, family, interests, work, travel, and current events	Understandable to native speaker not used to dealing with foreigners; sometimes miscommunicates
1	Can create with the language, ask and answer questions, participate in short conversations	Everyday survival topics and courtesy requirements	Intelligible to native speaker used to dealing with foreigners
0	No functional ability	None	Unintelligible

Source: Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro. *ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual.* Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1982.

Illustration 1.3. Functional Trisection of Oral Proficiency Levels

procedure for administering the oral interview will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.)

Novice (ILR Level 0/0+) Individuals performing at the Novice Level of proficiency, though perhaps capable of some limited expression in the language, have no real functional ability to communicate with what they know. Typically, their speech is characterized by the use of a few memorized words or phrases, with little

or no syntactic variation beyond the scope of the prefabricated, familiar material at their disposal.

Novice-Level speakers can often give short lists of vocabulary and/or answer simple questions relating to everyday topics such as the following:

1. Names of basic objects
2. Names of family members
3. Names of colors
4. Names of articles of clothing
5. Weather expressions
6. Days of the week
7. Months of the year
8. Today's date
9. The current year
10. The current time of day

These ten topics, also known in the context of the oral interview as the "ten desperate questions," will often elicit some sample of speech when all other attempts at conversation fail. This is not to say that every Novice-Level speaker can say something about all ten topics, nor that these are the only content areas that such individuals can control. Rather, they are meant to suggest the *type* of speech one can expect to elicit at the lowest levels of oral proficiency.

At the *Novice-High (ILR 0+)* Level on the academic scale, speakers have considerably more memorized material within their control and some ability to communicate their own personal messages with that material. However, they are still unable to create with the language; that is, they are generally not able to handle conversational topics with which they are unfamiliar or to paraphrase to express ideas they haven't expressed previously. They are also unable to handle a typical "survival situation" that would be encountered in the target culture, such as finding a room at a hotel, obtaining directions, ordering a simple meal, handling transportation needs, and the like. These skills constitute the minimal or threshold capabilities of the *Intermediate* range of proficiency.

Intermediate (ILR Level 1/1+)

Individuals in the Intermediate range of oral proficiency have the following characteristics:

1. They can *create* with the language; that is, they can express their own thoughts without relying exclusively on prefabricated or memorized responses to get their meaning across.

2. They are capable of *asking* questions as well as of answering them. Whereas Novice-Level speakers respond to questions in a "knee-jerk" fashion with one or two words, Intermediate-Level speakers answer with longer phrases or full sentences and are capable of holding up their own end of the conversation by making inquiries and offering more elaborate responses.

3. They have at least a minimal level of sociolinguistic competence in that they can handle everyday social encounters (greetings, leave takings, the use of polite formulas, and the like) with some degree of appropriateness.
4. They can handle a simple "survival situation" that one might expect to encounter while traveling or residing for a short time in the target culture. Finding lodging, food, transportation, medical assistance, obtaining directions, and the like present few problems for an Intermediate-Level speaker.
5. Their discourse is characterized by simple sentences or phrases, normally limited to present time, with little use of cohesive devices or embedded sentence structure. Intermediate-Level speech is usually quite inaccurate, even in basic structures, and vocabulary is quite limited. However, Intermediate-Level speakers are intelligible to native speakers who are *used to dealing with foreigners*.

At the *Intermediate-High (ILR 1+)* Level, speakers begin to take on some of the characteristics of the *Advanced* range of proficiency. However, they are unable to sustain performance at this higher level during the course of the interview and therefore do not meet the minimal threshhold characteristics for the Advanced Level.

Advanced (ILR Level 2/2+)

Speakers in the advanced range are capable of sustained conversation and can be characterized as follows:

1. They can narrate and describe in past, present, and future time. In addition, their narrations and descriptions are sustained in longer discourse segments; that is, Advanced-Level speakers generally speak in paragraphs rather than in short phrases or sentences.
2. They can talk about a wide range of concrete topics, including autobiographical details, daily routines at home, school, or at the workplace, current events, and the like. They can participate fully in casual conversations, expressing facts, giving instructions, describing places, people, and things, reporting on events, and providing narration about past, present, and future activities.
3. They can "live off of the economy" of the target culture and can handle routine work requirements with facility. Faced with a "survival situation" in which a complication has arisen (such as a missed plane, an unsatisfactory hotel room, a flat tire, or similar situation in which one must explain one's way out of trouble), Advanced-Level speakers can get their message across successfully.
4. They show a greater degree of sociolinguistic competence in their speech, including some sensitivity to register and to the appropriateness of certain expressions in a given context.

5. Their strategic competence is improved. Some ability to paraphrase and to cope in more complicated situations is one of the hallmarks of speakers in this proficiency range.
6. Their discourse competence is also improved as they continue to use longer and more complex sentence structure to express their meaning. There is growing evidence of the ability to use cohesive devices to unify discourse.
7. Although they still make errors in some basic structures, their control of the grammatical system is much improved over that of Intermediate-Level speakers. They still display patterns of errors, however, and their linguistic system tends to break down when they are asked to perform functions that are controlled at the next highest level of proficiency. Nonetheless, Advanced-Level speakers are comprehensible to native speakers who are *not used to dealing with foreigners*.

At the *Advanced-Plus* Level, speakers have many of the characteristics of the *Superior* range, although they cannot sustain performance at that level.

Superior (ILR Levels 3, 3+, 4, 4+, 5)

The ACTFL/ETS scale collapses under one proficiency range all of the government ranges above Level 3. The reason for this will soon become clear. Basically, *Superior-Level* speakers can be characterized as follows:

1. They have, at the very minimum, a "professional" level of proficiency; that is, they can handle unknown topics and situations, give supported opinions, hypothesize, provide complicated explanations, describe in detail with a great deal of precision, and can tackle virtually any practical, social, professional, or abstract topic that they can discuss in their native language.
2. Although they may make random errors in grammar, especially in the more complicated structures of the language, speakers at the Superior Level rarely make errors that would interfere with comprehension or disturb the native speaker.
3. At the lower end of the Superior range (ILR Level 3), speakers may lack some precision in vocabulary, but they are rarely at a loss to express their meaning through paraphrase or circumlocution. Strategic competence is high at this level, as is discourse competence. Though the Level 3 speaker may be unfamiliar with some idiomatic expressions and unable to easily shift registers, sociolinguistic competence is continuously developing. Only at Levels 4 and 5, however, would speakers be able to systematically tailor their language to any audience in a totally appropriate fashion. At these higher levels, vocabulary also becomes much more precise, and speakers

can choose from a wide range of synonyms in much the same manner as they do in their native language.

As stated previously, the brief descriptions of proficiency levels given here are summary statements, or shorthand characteristics, used to familiarize practitioners with the concepts relating to proficiency testing. Note that the level definitions do *not* specify particular grammatical structures or lexical items that need to be controlled, but outline instead more generalized performance criteria that must be met at each level of proficiency. Performance within the levels of proficiency is not completely uniform; on the contrary, there is often quite a wide variation in the *details* of performance, especially in the intermediate and advanced ranges. The descriptions provided by the *ACTFL Guidelines* (see Appendix A) provide more complete information about the nature of the performance that might be expected within proficiency ranges. For the most complete description and discussion of oral proficiency testing, see Liskin-Gasparro (1982).

Some Research Findings about Oral Proficiency

What level of proficiency can students expect to reach at the end of a given course of study? What is the average proficiency level of classroom teachers in high school and college programs? How long does it take to reach the Superior Level of proficiency in a given language? These and other questions have been addressed in recent years through the use of oral proficiency interviews and data collected from both government and academic sources.

In a study reported by Carroll (1967), the foreign language proficiency of undergraduate majors in French, Spanish, German, and Russian was assessed using the oral interview procedure as one measure in a battery of tests. The tests, administered in the second semester of their senior year, revealed that the typical rating obtained was 2 or 2+. It is important to bear in mind that the students tested were foreign language *majors* at the end of their college program who had concentrated on both language and literature study for at least four years, who may have had additional coursework in high school, and who may have spent some time abroad. Yet very few of these students were able to reach Level 3 (Superior) proficiency in oral skills. A similar study involving college professors who had resided abroad or had studied in the target culture as Fullbright scholars revealed that the typical rating obtained after immersion in the target language community was Level 3 or 3+.

In a more informal study undertaken recently by ETS, approximately 30 high school students in Spanish were tested using the oral interview. Students ranged from those with very little Spanish to those who had studied for four years. Although the teachers felt that there were significant differences in the oral abilities of these students, most were rated

in the 0 to 0+ (Novice) range (Liskin-Gasparro, 1982). These results, coupled with those reported in the Carroll study, should give us a better perspective on what our expectations might be for the majority of students in our programs, given the limited time available for language study.

Illustration 1.4 reveals some interesting facts about the amount of *time* it takes for students to reach the Superior range of proficiency in various languages. The data were collected and analyzed by the School of Language Studies of the Foreign Service Institute. The chart summarizes FSI experience with students taught in its own classes, which are typically quite small and meet a maximum of 30 hours per week. Note that for American students, the easiest languages include French, Italian, and Spanish, the next group in difficulty includes German, and the third most difficult includes Russian and Hebrew. Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean are the most difficult languages to master of the 44 languages listed (Liskin-Gasparro, 1982).

According to the data in Illustration 1.4, it takes 720 hours of instruction under ideal conditions to enable a student with a superior aptitude for languages to reach Level 3 in oral skills in French or Spanish. The attainment of a similar level in German or one of the less commonly taught languages would take even longer. This is further evidence that we must amend our expectations for students in high school and college programs to conform with the facts. Even with 72 hours of contact time per semester, college students would need *at least* ten semesters of language instruction to reach this goal.

One other study that sheds light on the issue of expectations for students in academic programs and the relative impact of various components of communicative competence on proficiency ratings was reported by Higgs and Clifford (1982). In 1978, the Research Committee of the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) began investigating the relative contribution of various components or subskills to global language proficiency. The hypothesis under consideration was that the relative contribution of factors such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and sociolinguistic competence was *not* constant across proficiency ranges. For example, it was felt that vocabulary would be more important than grammatical accuracy for successful performance at Level 1 (Intermediate); at Level 2 (Advanced), the role of grammar would become more important; at Level 5, all five factors, or subskills, would contribute equally.

At the time that the Relative Contribution Model was hypothesized (see Illustration 1.5), no data base containing both global proficiency ratings and subskill scores for the factors existed. In order to verify or refute the hypothesis, some 50 foreign language teachers representing seventeen of the languages taught at the CIA Language School were asked to judge the relative importance of each of the model's components for each proficiency level. The results of their collective judgments are represented in

Illustration 1.4. Expected Levels of Speaking Proficiency in Languages Taught at the Foreign Service Institute

Group I: Afrikaans, Danish, Dutch, French, Haitian Creole, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish.

Length of Training	Aptitude for Language Learning		
	Minimum	Average	Superior
8 weeks (240 hours)	1	1/1+	1+
16 weeks (480 hours)	1+	2	2+
24 weeks (720 hours)	2	2+	3

Group II: Bulgarian, Dari, Farsi, German, Greek, Hindi, Indonesian, Malay, Urdu

Length of Training	Aptitude for Language Learning		
	Minimum	Average	Superior
16 weeks (480 hours)	1	1/2+	1+/2
24 weeks (720 hours)	1+	2	2+/3
44 weeks (1320 hours)	2/2+	2+/3	3/3+

Group III: Amharic, Bengali, Burmese, Czech, Finnish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Khmer, Lao, Nepali, Pilipino, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Sinhala, Thai, Tamil, Turkish, Vietnamese

Length of Training	Aptitude for Language Learning		
	Minimum	Average	Superior
16 weeks (480 hours)	0+	1	1/1+
24 weeks (720 hours)	1+	2	2/2+
44 weeks (1320 hours)	2	2+	3

Group IV: Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean

Length of Training	Aptitude for Language Learning		
	Minimum	Average	Superior
16 weeks (480 hours)	0+	1	1
24 weeks (720 hours)	1	1+	1+
44 weeks (1320 hours)	1+	2	2+
80–92 weeks (2400–2760 hours)	2+	3	3+

Source: Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro. *ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual*. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1982.

the version of the model given in Illustrations 1.6. As hypothesized, vocabulary is the most important component for success at Level 1, with pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and sociolinguistic appropriateness contributing relatively less to the global rating. As the proficiency level increases, the relative contribution of each factor changes. (No factor ever decreases in importance, since all subskills constantly improve as the proficiency level increases. However, the *relative* weight of a given subskill in making a global judgment may decrease, as seen in the model.)

According to Higgs and Clifford, the implications of this hypothesized model of oral proficiency for curriculum design are clear:

If the goal of the curriculum is to produce Level 3 speakers of a language, then the concentration on language subskills in the curriculum should be representative of their relative importance in performing Level 3 tasks. Grammar skills

would be an important part of the curriculum. If the goal is to produce students with Level 1 survival skills, then the optimum curriculum mix would be entirely different, with a primary emphasis on the teaching and practice of vocabulary. (p. 73)

These considerations will be kept in mind when formulating our hypotheses about the nature of proficiency-oriented instruction. But before those hypotheses are stated, the nature of second language acquisition, especially in adults and adolescents, must be considered. Some of the major theoretical positions on this issue, dating from the earlier part of this century to the present, are summarized briefly in the next section.

How Do Adults Become Proficient In a Second Language?

Theories of language acquisition in the twentieth century have been greatly influenced by trends in psychology. Even before the advent of experimental psychology, language educators had turned to psychologists for insights into the language-acquisition process. The *grammar-translation* method, popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Chapter 2) was congruent with the thinking underlying faculty psychology, a mental-discipline theory that proclaimed that the mind was a muscle needing vigorous exercise. Psychologists posited three major faculties: thinking, feeling, and willing. Each of the faculties was then subdivided into sub-faculties, such as memory, imagination, and the like. In order to improve the powers of the mind, one needed to exercise these faculties regularly through problem-solving activities and other forms of mental discipline. The learning of Latin and Greek had been justified as an intellectually stimulating, disciplined activity in which the mind could be trained through the logical analysis of language. This traditional approach to language learning, coupled with the principles of faculty psychology, exerted a strong influence over language instruction in modern languages. Thus, the grammar-translation method involved a great deal of memorization of intricate rules and paradigms, copious translation exercises whose purpose was to encourage application of the rules, and the reading and translation of literary texts. If the mind was indeed a muscle, this method would surely strengthen it, as anyone who has gone through a strict grammar-translation approach to language learning can attest.

In the early twentieth century, three schools of psychology dominated thinking about the way the human mind functioned, replacing in popularity the faculty psychologists' doctrine of mental powers. Of the three—Gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis, and behaviorism—it was the latter that had the most profound influence on approaches to learning in the first half of the century. Since ancient times philosophers had believed that human learning and animal learning were parallel, if not contiguous.

THE SUMMER INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS
SECOND LANGUAGE ORAL PROFICIENCY EVALUATION

PREFACE

We often question the need of a speech community to have literature translated into its mother tongue when they seem to be bilingual in some other language that already has literature available. We ask, and others ask us, 'If they already know French so well (or Spanish or Swahili or ...), why don't they just read the French Bible?' Well, we want to know if they really understand French. For example, do they understand complex arguments in French? Can they understand detailed explanations in French, the sort of explanations that require precise shades of meaning? Are implications, proverbs, and figures of speech readily understood? How about concepts that don't exist in their own language? These are the sorts of questions for which we would like to have answers before we say that a speech community is adequately bilingual in French.*

This manual describes a technique developed to accurately measure oral proficiency in a second language. It is a modified version of the procedure used by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the U.S. Department of State to measure the oral proficiency of government employees. The modifications we have made in the procedure to adapt it for use in societies that include pre- literate communities will enable us to retain the validity and repeatability that the FSI has maintained throughout their long experience with oral proficiency testing. The FSI began working with oral proficiency testing in the 1950's and currently over four thousand individuals are tested in more than forty languages each year using the general technique which has been adopted by many agencies of the U.S. Government, other governments and non- government organizations.

As the technique has evolved, three implementations have emerged as the best known and researched. They are: the 'old' FSI version that is described in the 1979 Testing Kit which is now no longer available, several procedures similar to that of the Educational Testing Service and American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ETS/ACTFL), and the current FSI version. The current FSI version was chosen as the basis of the SIL modification for several reasons: (1) it adequately measures comprehension as an important component of oral proficiency, (2) it focusses on function, that is, on what the subject can communicate with the language allowing compensation for some weaknesses by strengths, (3) it does not require the evaluator to have a high level of proficiency in the language being evaluated, (4) it does not require the sort of massive sociolinguistic studies which the ETS/ACTFL method appears to require before testing can be done in a previously untested language, and (5) it is better able to distinguish the upper levels of communicative competence in which SIL is primarily interested as opposed to the ETS/ACTFL version which concentrates on the lower levels which are more common with students learning a foreign language in school.

It is anticipated that most of the dozen or so SIL participants who have received the training necessary to administer this test will apply the test in the coming year and be able to report on its usefulness. Field use may produce further refinements and elaboration of procedures and scoring as well.

Getting an accurate, valid measure of a good sample of a language group is the first step. An assessment of the need for literature and Scripture translation is next. To do this, the following criterion is suggested.

BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT SCORING FORM

PLACE: L2: NUMBER: DATE:

NAME: AGE: SEX: EDUCATION:
PLACE OF BIRTH: OCCUPATION: MOTHER TONGUE:

CURRENT RESIDENCE: STATUS: OTHER TONGUES:

SPOUSE'S MOTHER TONGUE: SPOUSE'S OTHER TONGUES:

PLACES TRAVELLED: DEGREE OF CONTACT WITH L2:
TESTER: LINGUIST: ASSISTANT:

WARM-UP TOPIC: W- PART TWO TOPIC: G- PART THREE TOPIC: R-

SCORING THE ASSESSMENT

1. ASSIGNING THE CHECKMARKS TO THE SCORING GRID

The first step in scoring the assessment is to match the SUBJECT's performance with the "performance standards" in the scoring grid. For each of the five factors, find the cell containing the description which best exemplifies the overall performance on that factor. Put a checkmark in that cell. If you cannot decide on the basis of the abbreviated descriptions in the scoring grid, refer to the full descriptions of the "Performance Standards" section. You should be able to find a description that fits what you have heard the SUBJECT do during the assessment.

2. GETTING THE RAW SCORE

Compare the checkmarks you have made on the scoring grid with the Raw Score Table. Select the specific numbers from within the boxes that you have checked and write them down. There should be five numbers in all, one for each performance factor.

The total of the five numbers is the RAW SCORE.

3. FINDING THE S-SCORE

Locate the Raw Score you have obtained on the S-Score table. It shows the corresponding S-Score. Refer to the Skill Level Descriptions to verify that the description for the S-Score indicated fits the sample.

4. SCORE VERIFICATION

Read the Skill Level Description for the S-Score designated by the Raw Score. Then read the Skill Level Description for the S-Score immediately above and below the designated S-Score. Verify that the designated S-Score is indeed the most accurate description of the SUBJECT's bilingual proficiency.

If one of the alternate Skill Level Descriptions better describes the SUBJECT's proficiency, review the tape and re-assign the checkmarks on the scoring grid for more accurate performance standards (see Step One, above). Then re-calculate the Raw Score.

If you are convinced that the original assignment of performance standards was accurate, then adjust the numbers assigned in each of the boxes for the performance standards and re-calculate the Raw Score (see Step Two, above.)

FIVE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

1. COMPREHENSION evaluates how well the subject understands what is said in the L2. As understood by the assessment technique, comprehension is interactive, that is, it includes the social meaning and implications of the speech act as well as the meaning of the spoken words.

2. DISCOURSE COMPETENCE evaluates speech above the sentence level. As understood by the assessment technique, discourse competence includes how the subject organizes his/her speech and copes with the demands of face-to-face interaction in making his/her meaning clear. This is exemplified by how well the subject manages turn-taking, the cohesiveness of the information presented, links ideas together, transitions between thoughts, etc.

3. STRUCTURAL PRECISION evaluates the use of the non-discretionary rule-governed aspects of the syntactical, morphological, and phonological systems of the language. As understood by the assessment technique, structural precision includes evaluating how accurately and appropriately the subject controls and encodes messages in the L2.

4. LEXICALIZATION evaluates the breadth and appropriateness of the lexicon available to the subject. As understood by the assessment technique, lexicalization includes how well the subject uses the connotative and denotative meanings of words, idioms, metaphors, synonyms and their near-equivalents, etc.

5. FLUENCY evaluates the continuity, quantity, and accessibility of the speech produced by the subject. As understood by the assessment technique, fluency includes the ability to produce speech without effort in the appropriate quantity and degree of smoothness according to the context of the speech act.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FIVE FACTORS AT EACH PERFORMANCE STANDARD

COMPREHENSION (INTERACTIVE)

BLOCKING - MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF VERY SIMPLE LANGUAGE. The subject may understand fragments of ongoing speech which is simplified (i.e., relies on very high-frequency lexicon and structure) and artificially slowed. The subject may not recognize that he/she has misunderstood, responding in an incorrect, inappropriate, or unrelated manner. Even with repetition and clarification, the subject cannot understand enough to maintain an interaction even on common topics on which the tester and subject share knowledge.

DYSFUNCTIONAL- SUBJECT RECOGNIZES NON-UNDERSTANDINGS, WHICH ARE QUITE FREQUENT, but may not exhibit comprehension even after repetition or clarification. Comprehension is generally restricted to common topics on which subject and tester share knowledge. The native speaker must adjust the speed and complexity of speech in order to be understood. If the target language has a close genetic relationship with the subject's mother tongue, or if the subject's mother tongue has borrowed much of its lexicon from the target language (as is the case with some creoles), then comprehension may appear to be quite precocious, but this is not supported by evidence of comprehension of non-shared aspects of the language.

INTRUSIVE- DIFFICULTIES IN COMPREHENSION SLOW DOWN THE INTERACTION. The subject exhibits understanding after clarifications, paraphrase, repetition, or some simplification. Range of contexts in which the subject exhibits understanding may be wide. Speed of speech may need to be adjusted by the tester.

ACCEPTABLE - EXHIBITS UNDERSTANDING QUICKLY WHEN CLARIFICATION, REPETITION, OR PARAPHRASE IS GIVEN. The subject follows natural speech which has not been artificially adjusted in speed, lexicon, or structure. The subject catches own non-understandings, which are relatively infrequent. Range of comprehension is quite wide, and depends very little on similarities between the target language and the mother tongue. Comprehension, nevertheless, may be obviously greater in those areas in which the subject and the tester share a common real-world referential knowledge which is derived from or dependent upon the tester's familiarity with, or even membership in the subject's culture, rather than vice versa.

SUCCESSFUL - UNDERSTANDING IS LIMITED ONLY BY CULTURAL BACKGROUND or lack of some "shared assumptions" with target language speakers. That is, there are examples of the denotative or referential meaning being understood, without the implications. Few errors of comprehension over the range of tested material. Idioms and metaphors, however, may not be comprehended without explanation. The converse of this, i.e., when there is good understanding of cultural reference, but the subject's ability to understand a wide sample of general language is limited, should not be rated "successful".

SUPERIOR - UNDERSTANDING IS ESSENTIALLY COMPLETE in the context of face-to-face interaction. The subject's understanding of the underlying cultural assumptions and/or frame of reference of the target language is such that he/she can draw appropriate inferences from the tester in most circumstances.

DISCOURSE COMPETENCE

BLOCKING - UNABLE TO PRODUCE CONTINUOUS DISCOURSE. Utterances are largely stock phrases or learned routines. Sentences may be fragmented when that is inappropriate. Essentially no cohesion within and/or transition between utterances. Turn-taking behavior is highly unnatural.

DYSFUNCTIONAL - MINIMALLY ELABORATE PERFORMANCE on language-use tasks. Utterances are largely discrete and ill fit with each other and with the gist of the interaction, but individual utterances may be well formed, and some routines such as greeting sequences and simple pleasantries seem quite natural. Nevertheless, the subject is a very unequal partner in the conversation. Turn-taking is usually stilted and unnatural. The tester must draw out the passive speaker and frequently ask for elaboration from the subject who cannot develop ideas clearly and cohesively in extended production activities. Involvement with the topic and/or substance in the presentation is very obviously lacking.

INTRUSIVE - PERFORMANCE SHOWS LACK OF COHESION. Range of discourse devices (e.g., conversational management devices, markers, and referentials) is limited. The tester must concentrate and interpret to follow the subject's line of thought. Nevertheless, the subject can respond to the tester's questions, comments, and observations, getting main points across, though with a distinctly repetitive or awkward repertoire of functional devices. Turn-taking behavior may be good.

ACCEPTABLE - DISCOURSE IS COHESIVE. Discussion can be maintained comfortably by both parties. Turn-taking behavior is generally quite natural. The subject's use of function markers is appropriate and non-repetitive. The SUBSTANCE of longer presentations and/or discussions becomes more noticeable than the form. The subject exhibits involvement with the topic of the interview. The subject may make his/her point with development, support, transitions, etc. Nevertheless, flexibility is somewhat limited. There may be some errors in cohesion devices such as personal, spatial, and temporal references (deixis). Ellipsis, sentence fragments, and sophisticated discourse devices, such as complex modification or embedding may be largely absent or rudimentary.

SUCCESSFUL - DISCOURSE IS WELL ORGANIZED. Relationships among ideas are clearly marked with a moderately wide range of appropriately used discourse devices, such as synonyms, co-reference, complex modification, and varied syntactic patterns. Development of ideas is clear and marked; transition between ideas, conclusions, parenthetic observations, etc. are appropriately indicated, for example, by intonation, controlled speed change, the target language equivalent of rhetorical devices, etc. Communication is largely independent and assertive, but palpably non-native.

SUPERIOR - BROAD FLEXIBLE CONTROL OF FUNCTIONAL RHETORICAL SPEECH DEVICES. The range is similar to that available to the articulate well-informed native speaker. The subject communicates assertively, when appropriate, and can take and hold the floor, open and close discussion and control the discourse to bring about his/her own desired outcomes (e.g. the inference might be drawn that the subject is quite competent at suasion). Uses the language to convey attitudinal as well as referential information to the tester. Reliably puts his/her explicit (and usually also implicit) communicative intent into the target language.

STRUCTURAL PRECISION

BLOCKING - STRUCTURAL ACCURACY IS LARGELY RANDOM, and/or phonological structure is so unusual that the tester for the majority of the performance is confused as to the subject's intended message. The vast preponderance of utterances beyond memorized, high-frequency routines contain such inaccuracies of usage (morphological, syntactic, or phonological) that communication is largely telegraphic.

DYSFUNCTIONAL - MISCOMMUNICATION ARISES FREQUENTLY DUE TO LACK OF CONTROL OF STRUCTURE. Consistently high level of inaccuracy in high-frequency features of morphology, syntax, and/or phonology, which causes the subject to have to repeat, rephrase, or even change what he/she wishes to say. Communication is limited and subject is perceived to be ineffective at using the structure of the language reliably.

INTRUSIVE - INCONSISTENT ACCURACY IN RELATIVELY HIGH-FREQUENCY areas of syntax, morphology, and/or phonology distract the tester. Generally the subject manages to encode messages in a fashion which is comprehensible. Often, however, the tester must use the context, real-world referential knowledge, etc., in order to follow the subject's performance. The possibilities exist for confusion, and the tester must work actively at understanding the subject's performance.

ACCEPTABLE - STRUCTURAL INACCURACY IS RARELY THE MAJOR CAUSE OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS. Errors which do exist are not perceived to be major deficiencies in the contexts which have arisen during the course of the assessment, and the inference can be made that they should not prove to be impediments in naturally arising contexts.

SUCCESSFUL - RANGE AND CONTROL OF THE STRUCTURE IS GREAT; control of even low-frequency features of structure give subject wide flexibility of expression; lack of control of low-frequency structural features rarely constitutes a reason for ambiguities or misunderstandings to arise. The tester is convinced that the subject can reliably use the structural features of the language to encode his/her communicative intent.

SUPERIOR - STRUCTURAL ACCURACY AND FLEXIBILITY APPROACHES BILINGUAL COMPETENCE. While phonetically the speech may be identifiably unusual, it is perceived to be an acceptable stylistic variant which is not meaning-altering.

LEXICALIZATION

BLOCKING - LEXICALIZATION INACCURATE AND VERY NARROW. Tester may not understand the meanings intended, or, when subject attempts extended discourse, cannot follow the gist of the performance.

DYSFUNCTIONAL - LEXICALIZATION RANGE IS NARROW AND HIGHLY UNNATURAL FOR THE LANGUAGE. The tester is required to request the subject to rephrase utterances frequently; if the subject is unable to find better lexicalization, he/she may be forced to change the sense of his intended message in order to accommodate lexical deficiencies. Word-choice and phrasing may be heavily calqued, i.e. loan translated out of the subject's mother tongue (or some other language), thus the subject may string together items whose individual meanings are overridden by the "sum-of-the-parts" meaning of the utterance. Frequent occurrences of the above phenomena render the performance on this factor DYSFUNCTIONAL.

INTRUSIVE - LEXICALIZATION IS UNUSUAL AND/OR IMPRECISE, although vocabulary may seem numerically extensive. Often, however, the tester must use the context, real-world knowledge, etc., in order to follow the subject's performance. The tester may be required to request rephrasing of utterances, but the subject IS CAPABLE of repairing the source of the difficulty. Frequently, the lexical choices within a given phrase, sentence, topic, etc., may appear to be drawn from different stylistic registers. Calqued (literally translated) phrases, "made-up words", misuse of idioms/metaphors/proverbs, etc. may be confusing and/or irritating to the native-speaking tester. The tester usually understands the subject well, but must sometimes rely on familiarity with the speech of learners of his/her language.

ACCEPTABLE - LEXICALIZATION IS CLEAR, AND RELATIVELY NATURAL. Appropriate lexical choices are made in language-use tasks. Lack of breadth in vocabulary is well compensated for by clear periphrasis. The tester understands the intended meanings of the subject. Stylistic nuances may be rarely employed, but errors of register choice are rare. Idioms/metaphors/proverbs, etc. may be misused, but not frequently, and not so as to confuse or irritate the tester. Loan-translations are very infrequent and do not interfere with effective transmission of the subject's message.

SUCCESSFUL - VERY INFREQUENT IMPRECISION OF LEXICALIZATION. Range of contexts in which appropriate lexical choices are made is wide and highly relevant to sophisticated, or formal language-use skill requirements. Obscure, childhood, and specialized low-frequency vocabulary may be expected to be absent at this level. Idioms, humor, relatively accurate cultural reference, and subtleties of lexical distinctions between closely related concepts are evident and significantly enrich the overall performance of the subject. The tester feels confident that the subject is conveying his/her communicative intent.

SUPERIOR - LEXICALIZATION IS PRECISE. Not only can the subject encode concepts precisely, he/she can convey essentially any message appropriate to the context (social, situational, contentual). Lexical control is essentially that of an articulate well-informed native speaker. Stylistic nuances, such as control of near synonyms for attitudinal tone, effect, use of literate, even classical, vocabulary, and appropriate use of metaphor/proverb/idiom, as well as well-chosen cultural, historical, and/or literary reference characterize the overall performance. In languages where formal/elevated style exists, it may be evidence of the subject's ability to use that style effectively which gives maximum credit on this factor.

FLUENCY

BLOCKING - SUBJECT SPEAKS WITH DIFFICULTY. Quantity of speech is insufficient for even minimal communication. When speech does occur, pause time exceeds speaking time.

DYSFUNCTIONAL - FLUENCY IS IRREGULAR. Continuity and quantity of speech is inadequate for communication beyond social interchange. When subject attempts to engage in more complex speech, he/she pauses frequently in mid-utterance or between utterances. The subject frequently starts to say something which he/she cannot finish. Pauses are unfilled or not suitably filled.

INTRUSIVE - SUBJECT SPEAKS READILY BUT NOT FLUENTLY. Continuity and quantity of speech seems to be adequate for a variety of communication tasks. However, hesitations, false starts, self-interruptions and self-corrections may abound.

ACCEPTABLE - SUBJECT SPEAKS READILY, SUITABLY FILLING PAUSES. Continuity and quantity of speech is adequate for all but the most complex communication tasks. Long lapses in production, false starts and unintentionally incomplete sentences occur, but are self-repaired.

SUCCESSFUL - PERFORMANCE IS FLUENT. Quantity of speech is sufficient even for unusual speaking tasks. While there may be hesitations and self corrections, as well as some searching for words, this is not perceived as disruptive.

SUPERIOR - THE FLOW OF SPEECH IS EFFORTLESS AND SMOOTH IN EVERY RESPECT.

THE SUMMER INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS LANGUAGE SKILL LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The following proficiency level descriptions characterize spoken language use. Each of the six "base levels" (coded 00, 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50) implies control of any previous "base levels" functions and accuracy. The "plus level" designation (coded 06, 16, 26, etc.) will be assigned when proficiency substantially exceeds one base skill level and does not fully meet the criteria for the next "base level". The "plus level" descriptions are therefore supplementary to the "base level" descriptions.

A skill level is assigned to a person through an authorized language assessment. Linguists assign a level on a variety of performance criteria exemplified in the descriptive statements. Therefore, the examples given here illustrate, but do not exhaustively describe, either the skills a person may possess or situations in which he/she may function effectively.

Statements describing accuracy refer to typical stages in the development of competence in the most commonly taught languages in formal training programs. In other languages, emerging competence parallels these characterizations, but often with different details.

Unless otherwise specified the term "native speaker" refers to native speakers of a standard dialect. In the context of these proficiency descriptions, "well-educated" does not necessarily imply formal higher education. However, in cultures where formal higher education is common, the language-use abilities of persons who have had such education is considered the standard. That is, such a person meets contemporary expectations for the formal, careful style of the language, as well as a range of less formal varieties of the language.

In situations where education does not necessarily define the best speakers of the standard variety of the target language, the variety used by any existing media, (e.g., radio, television, etc.) should be reflected in determining the standard. Respected people in the community should be consulted in determining the standard variety of the target language, in order to ensure that the testers chosen control a representative variety of speech.

LEVEL 0 (NO PROFICIENCY)

UNABLE TO FUNCTION IN THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE. Oral production is limited to occasional isolated words. Has essentially no communicative ability. (Data Code 00)

LEVEL 0+ (MEMORIZED PROFICIENCY)

ABLE TO SATISFY IMMEDIATE NEEDS USING REHEARSED UTTERANCES. Shows little real autonomy of expression, flexibility, or spontaneity. Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only with memorized utterances or formulae. Attempts at creating speech are usually unsuccessful.

EXAMPLES: The individual's vocabulary is usually limited to areas of immediate survival needs. Most utterances are telegraphic; that is, functors (linking words, markers, and the like) are omitted, confused, or distorted. An individual can usually differentiate most significant sounds when produced in isolation, but, when combined in words or groups of words, errors may be frequent. Even with repetition, communication is

severely limited even with people used to dealing with foreigners. Stress, intonation, tone, etc. are usually quite faulty. (Data Code 06)

LEVEL 1 (ELEMENTARY PROFICIENCY)

ABLE TO SATISFY MINIMUM COURTESY REQUIREMENTS AND MAINTAIN VERY SIMPLE FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS ON FAMILIAR TOPICS. A native speaker must often use slowed speech, repetition, paraphrase, or a combination of these to be understood by this individual. Similarly, the native speaker must strain and employ real-world knowledge to understand even simple statements/questions from this individual. This speaker has a functional, but limited proficiency. Misunderstandings are frequent, the individual is able to ask for help and to verify comprehension of native speech in face-to-face interaction. The individual is unable to produce continuous discourse except with rehearsed material.

EXAMPLES: Structural accuracy is likely to be random or severely limited. Time concepts are vague. Vocabulary is inaccurate, and its range is very narrow. The individual often speaks with great difficulty. By repeating, such speakers can make themselves understood to native speakers who are in regular contact with foreigners but there is little precision in the information conveyed. Needs, experience, or training may vary greatly from individual to individual; for example, speakers at this level may have encountered quite different vocabulary areas. However, the individual can typically satisfy predictable, simple, personal and accommodation needs; can generally meet courtesy, introduction, and identification requirements; exchange greetings; elicit and provide, for example, predictable and skeletal biographical information. He/she might give information about business hours, explain routine procedures in a limited way, and state in a simple manner what actions will be taken. He/she is able to formulate some questions even in languages with complicated question constructions. Almost every utterance may be characterized by structural errors and errors in basic grammatical relations. Vocabulary is extremely limited and characteristically does not include modifiers. Pronunciation, stress, and intonation are generally poor, often heavily influenced by another language. Use of structure and vocabulary is highly imprecise. (Data Code 10)

LEVEL 1+ (ELEMENTARY PROFICIENCY, PLUS)

CAN INITIATE AND MAINTAIN PREDICTABLE FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS AND SATISFY LIMITED SOCIAL DEMANDS. He/she may, however, have little understanding of the social conventions of conversation. The interlocutor is generally required to strain and employ real-world knowledge to understand even some simple speech. The speaker at this level may hesitate and may have to change subjects due to lack of language resources. Range and control of the language are limited. Speech largely consists of a series of short, discrete utterances.

EXAMPLES: The individual is able to satisfy most travel and accommodation needs and a limited range of social demands beyond the exchange of skeletal biographic information. Speaking ability may extend beyond immediate survival needs. Accuracy in basic grammatical relations is evident, although not consistent. May exhibit the more common forms of verb tenses, for example, but may make frequent errors in formation and selection. While some structures are established, errors occur in more complex patterns. The individual typically cannot sustain coherent structures in longer utterances or unfamiliar situations. Ability to describe and give precise information is limited. Person, space, and time references are often used incorrectly. Pronunciation is understandable to natives used to dealing with foreigners. Can combine most significant sounds with reasonable comprehensibility, but has difficulty in producing certain sounds

in certain positions or in certain combinations. Speech will usually be labored. Frequently has to repeat utterances to be understood by the general public. (Data Code 16)

LEVEL 2 (LIMITED PROFICIENCY)

ABLE TO SATISFY ROUTINE SOCIAL DEMANDS AND LIMITED REQUIREMENTS IN OTHER DOMAINS. Can handle routine work-related interactions that are limited in scope. In more complex and sophisticated language tasks, language usage generally disturbs the native speaker. Can handle with confidence, but not with facility, most normal, high-frequency social conversational situations including extensive, but casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information. The individual can get the gist of most everyday conversations but has some difficulty understanding the native speaker in situations that require specialized or sophisticated knowledge. The individual's utterances are minimally cohesive. Linguistic structure is usually not very elaborate and not thoroughly controlled; errors are frequent. Vocabulary use is appropriate for high-frequency utterances, but unusual or imprecise elsewhere.

EXAMPLES: While these interactions will vary widely from individual to individual, the individual can typically ask and answer predictable questions in familiar domains and can understand and give straightforward instructions to others. Additionally, the individual can participate in personal and accommodation-type interactions with elaboration and facility; that is, can give and understand complicated, detailed, and extensive directions and make non-routine changes in travel and accommodation arrangements. Simple structures and basic grammatical relations are typically controlled; however, there are areas of weakness. In the commonly taught languages, these may be simple markings such as plurals, articles, linking words, and negatives or more complex structures such as tense/aspect usage, case morphology, passive constructions, word order, and embedding. (Data Code 20)

LEVEL 2+ (LIMITED PROFICIENCY, PLUS)

ABLE TO SATISFY MOST REQUIREMENTS WITH LANGUAGE USAGE THAT IS OFTEN, BUT NOT ALWAYS, ACCEPTABLE AND EFFECTIVE. The individual shows considerable ability to communicate effectively on topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Often shows a high degree of fluency and ease of speech, yet when under tension or pressure, the ability to use the language effectively may deteriorate. Comprehension of normal native speech is typically nearly complete. The individual may miss cultural and local references and may require a native speaker to adjust to his/her limitations in some ways. Native speakers often perceive the individual's speech to contain awkward or inaccurate phrasing of ideas, mistaken time, space, and person references, or to be in some way inappropriate, if not strictly incorrect.

EXAMPLES: Typically the individual can participate in most social, formal, and informal interaction; but limitations either in range of contexts, types of tasks, or level of accuracy hinder effectiveness. The individual may be ill at ease with the use of the language either in social interaction or in speaking at length in occupational contexts. He/she is generally strong in either structural precision or vocabulary, but not in both. Weakness or unevenness in one of the foregoing, or in pronunciation, occasionally results in miscommunication. Normally controls, but cannot always easily produce general vocabulary. Discourse is often incohesive. (Data Code 26)

LEVEL 3 (GENERAL PROFICIENCY)

ABLE TO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE WITH SUFFICIENT STRUCTURAL ACCURACY AND VOCABULARY TO PARTICIPATE EFFECTIVELY IN MOST FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS ON PRACTICAL, SOCIAL AND OCCUPATIONAL TOPICS. Nevertheless, the individual's limitations generally restrict the special interest contexts of language use to shared knowledge and behavior understood cross-culturally. Discourse is cohesive. The individual uses the language acceptably, but with some noticeable imperfections; yet, errors virtually never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker. The individual can effectively combine structure and vocabulary to convey his/her meaning accurately. The individual speaks readily and fills pauses suitably. In face-to-face conversation with mother-tongue speakers of the standard dialect at a normal rate of speech, comprehension is quite complete. Although cultural references, proverbs, and the implications of nuances and idiom may not be fully understood, the individual can easily repair the conversation. Pronunciation may be obviously foreign. Individual sounds are accurate; but stress, intonation, and pitch control may be faulty.

EXAMPLES: Can typically discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease. Can use the language, for example, in any of several domains in order to answer objections, clarify points, justify decisions, understand the essence of challenges, state and defend accepted ways of doing business, conduct meetings, convey information, or other extended and elaborate informative monologues. Can reliably elicit information and informed opinion from native speakers. Structural inaccuracy is rarely the major cause of misunderstanding. Use of structural devices is flexible and elaborate. Without searching for words or phrases, the individual uses the language clearly and relatively naturally to elaborate concepts freely and make ideas easily understandable to native speakers. Errors occur in low-frequency and highly complex structures. (Data Code 30)

LEVEL 3+ (GENERAL PROFICIENCY PLUS)

IS OFTEN ABLE TO USE THE LANGUAGE TO SATISFY NEEDS IN A WIDE RANGE OF SOPHISTICATED AND DEMANDING TASKS.

EXAMPLES: Despite obvious strengths, may exhibit some hesitancy, uncertainty, effort, or errors which limit the range of language-use tasks that can be reliably performed. Typically there is particular strength in fluency and one or more, but not all, of the following: breadth of lexicon, including low- and medium-frequency items, especially sociolinguistic and cultural references, and nuances of close synonyms; structural precision, with sophisticated features that are readily, accurately, and appropriately controlled (such as complex modification and embedding in Indo-European languages); discourse competence in a wide range of contexts and tasks, often matching a native speaker's strategic and organizational abilities and expectations. Occasional patterned errors occur in low frequency and highly-complex structures. (Data Code 36)

LEVEL 4 (ADVANCED PROFICIENCY)

ABLE TO USE THE LANGUAGE FLUENTLY AND ACCURATELY ON ALL LEVELS NORMALLY PERTINENT TO NEEDS. The individual's language usage and ability to function are fully successful. Organizes discourse well, using appropriate rhetorical speech devices, appropriate cultural references and understanding. Language ability only rarely hinders him/her in performing any task requiring language; yet, the individual would seldom be perceived as a mother-tongue speaker. Speaks effortlessly and smoothly and is able to use the language with a high degree of effectiveness, reliability, and precision for all representational purposes within the range of personal and occupation related experience and scope of responsibilities. Can serve as an informal interpreter in a range of unpredictable circumstances. Can perform extensive, sophisticated language tasks, encompassing most matters of interest to "well-educated" native speakers, including tasks which do not bear directly on any occupational specialty.

EXAMPLES: Can discuss in detail concepts which are fundamentally different from those of the target culture and make those concepts clear and accessible to the native speaker. Similarly, the individual can understand the details and ramifications of concepts that are culturally or conceptually different from his/her own. Can set the tone of interpersonal verbal exchanges with a representative range of high and low status native speakers in a variety of audiences, tasks, and settings and with a variety of purposes. Can play an effective role among native speakers in such domains as the home, courts and government, religion, education, and debates on matters of disagreement. Can advocate a position at length, both formally and in chance encounters, using sophisticated verbal strategies. Understands and reliably produces shifts of both subject matter and tone. Can understand native speakers of the standard and other major dialects in essentially any face-to-face interaction. (Data Code 40)

LEVEL 4+ (ADVANCED PROFICIENCY, PLUS)

SPEAKING PROFICIENCY IS REGULARLY SUPERIOR IN ALL RESPECTS USUALLY EQUIVALENT TO THAT OF A "WELL-EDUCATED", HIGHLY ARTICULATE NATIVE SPEAKER. Language ability does not impede the performance of any language-use task. However, the individual would not necessarily be perceived culturally as a mother-tongue speaker.

EXAMPLES: The individual organizes discourse well, employing functional rhetorical speech devices, appropriate cultural references and understanding. Effectively applies a native speaker's social and circumstantial knowledge. However, cannot sustain that performance under all circumstances. While the individual has a wide range and control of structure, an occasional non-native slip may occur. The individual has a sophisticated control of vocabulary and phrasing that is rarely imprecise, yet there are occasional weaknesses in idioms, colloquialisms, pronunciation, cultural reference or there may be an occasional failure to interact in a totally appropriate manner. (Data Code 46)

LEVEL 5 (FUNCTIONALLY NATIVE PROFICIENCY)

SPEAKING PROFICIENCY IS FUNCTIONALLY EQUIVALENT TO THAT OF A HIGHLY ARTICULATE WELL-EDUCATED NATIVE SPEAKER AND REFLECTS THE CULTURAL STANDARDS OF THE COUNTRY WHERE THE LANGUAGE IS NATIVELY SPOKEN. The individual uses the language with complete flexibility and intuition, so that speech on all levels is fully accepted by "well-educated" native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references. Pronunciation is typically consistent with that of "well-educated" native speakers of a non-stigmatized dialect. (Data Code 50)

SECOND LANGUAGE ORAL PROFICIENCY EVALUATION

PLEASE PRINT — COMPLETE ALL INFORMATION

NAME (Last, First Middle)				___OK TO RECORD	___DO NOT RECORD
AGENCY					
SOCIAL SECURITY	DATE OF BIRTH (Month/Day/Year)		SEX. M F	SIGNATURE	
LANGUAGE	CODE	TESTING PLACE			
TEST DATE (Month/Day/Year)	DAY OF WEEK	TIME	TESTER		
TEST RESULT		LINGUIST			

RATING SCALE

	BLOCKING	DYSFUNCTIONAL	INTRUSIVE	ACCEPTABLE	SUCCESSFUL	SUPERIOR	RAW SCORE
COMPREHENSION	Misunderstandings of very simple language. 0–4	Examinee recognizes non-understandings which are quite frequent. X 5–9	Difficulties in comprehension slow down the interaction. 10–14	Exhibits understanding quickly when clarification, repetition or paraphrase is given. 15–19	Understanding is limited by cultural background. 20–24	Understanding is essentially complete. 25	
DISCOURSE	Unable to produce continuous discourse. 0–4	Minimally elaborate performance. X 5–9	Performance shows lack of cohesion. 10–14	Discourse is cohesive. 15–19	Discourse is well-organized. 20–24	Broad, flexible control of functional rhetorical devices. 25	
STRUCTURE	Structural accuracy is largely random. 0–5	Miscommunication arises frequently due to lack of control of structure. X 6–11	Inconsistent accuracy in relatively high frequency areas. 12–17	Structural inaccuracy is rarely the major cause of misunderstanding. 18–23	Range and control of the structure is great. 24–29	Structural accuracy and flexibility approach bilingual competence. 30	
LEXICALIZATION	Lexicalization is inaccurate and narrow. X 0–5	Lexicalization range is narrow and highly unnatural. X 6–11	Lexicalization is unusual and/or imprecise. 12–17	Lexicalization is clear and relatively natural. 18–23	Very infrequent imprecision of lexicalization. 24–29	Lexicalization is precise. 30	
FLUENCY	Examinee speaks with difficulty. 0	Fluency is irregular. X 1–3	Examinee speaks readily but not fluently. 4–5	Examinee speaks readily, suitably filling in pauses. 6–8	Performance is fluent. 9	The flow of speech is effortless and smooth. 10	

TOPICS: Warm Up ____________________

Getting Information ____________________

Giving Information ____________________

RAW SCORE TOTAL : ________

RAW SCORE:	0–5	6–18	19–31	32–44	45–57	58–70	71–83	84–96	97–109	110–118	120
S - SCORE:	0	0+	1	1+	2	2+	3	3+	4	4+	5

SIGNATURES: ____________________ LINGUIST ____________________ TESTER